

EARTH'S
SECRET
CORRIDOR

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A Novel

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Earth's Secret Corridor

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To my wife, whose love has strengthened my spirit...

And to the memory of my mother.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to my parents, my children, and grandchildren.

Chapter 1

Michael Simon looked out the kitchen window to see a young woman sitting on the old, oak tree swing. It was May Day, 1985. As Michael swung open the creaking door, a cool, soothing breeze entered the house.

“What is your name?” he loudly asked the woman on the swing.

“My name is Angela,” she stated, smiling. “I’m your neighbor.”

After a moment of hesitation, he responded, still sounding terse: “I’m Michael, and you are on my swing.”

“Do you mind?” she asked, as her shoulder-length brown hair blew in the wind.

“You are one of the Beth sisters, aren’t you?”

“Yes—yes, I am. How did you know that?” She laughed disarmingly as she turned her head and made eye contact.

“Would you like to come in and have a cup of coffee with me—or something? I just made a fresh pot.”

Angela walked inside and followed him to the kitchen door where she stood calm and poised. Michael turned and glanced at her. She was beautiful. She was an expression of curves and contours that made his mouth water.

“When exactly did you move in next door?” Michael handed Angela the cup of java with the sunshine motif painted on it.

“I moved in not too long ago, actually.”

Angela looked at him with her dark brown eyes. Her eyes were not the only thing, of course, that caught his attention. The olive skin of her cleavage, beneath a white, slightly open blouse, gleamed with reflection and, not surprisingly,

aroused Michael. A snug, fitted denim skirt fell just above the young woman's knees, accenting her long legs.

"Are you the new teacher the high school hired?" Michael inquired.

"Yeah, but I do teach other things."

Her voice was musical when she spoke. Her words seemed to flow like the notes of a song. It was soft, romantic, and sweet.

"I could arrange a welcoming party for you. It seems like the right thing to do for a new neighbor. Don't you think?" said Michael. As he awkwardly gazed at her, he thought about the possibilities for romance.

Michael had just ended a relationship with Julie Rieston. He and Julie had been together for about two years. Michael felt that he and Julie were inseparable, until he learned of Julie's indiscretion with one of his close friends. The betrayal left him empty and feeling incomplete. Although all of that had happened in such a short period of time, he realized that he now had an opportunity to put that all in the past. He was captivated by her beauty and knew he was vulnerable to a new love. He also knew that he could get hurt again. But, somehow, Angela seemed trustworthy.

"So, do you live alone in this big house?" Angela rested her shoulder against the wall and rubbed the coffee cup.

"Yeah, I purchased the place from my parents a short time ago."

She softly set her coffee cup on the granite counter and ran her fingers through the back of her hair, showing off her finely sculpted cheekbones and turquoise earrings. Then, she slipped her hands into her back pockets, which drew Michael's eyes down, tracing her curvy hips and small waistline.

"I must be dreaming. I need my composure, if I'm going to ask her to dinner," Michael thought to himself.

"I know this may sound a bit forward, but would you like to join me tomorrow, for something to eat at the downtown diner?" he asked.

Angela glanced into the living room through the French doors, slowly turned, and said, "Sure, you seem nice. I'll have to find something to wear first, though."

"It's not necessary to dress fancy or anything, Angela. I will call my friend, Dave Trip, and his girlfriend, Linda Stout, to see if they can join us. Would that interest you?"

"Don't you want me all to yourself, Michael? I sat on the swing to get your attention. We don't need a chaperone, do we?" she smiled.

Michael was full of masculine energy and felt compelled to act on it. Nevertheless, he needed to take the situation as it came. He always seemed to fall hard,

when it came to love. Michael's attraction to the opposite sex had started at a young age.

He was in first grade when he had his first real crush, a classmate named Barbara who often gave him handmade cards with hearts and lips drawn on them. In return, he sometimes walked Barbara to her house. His friends frequently teased him, claiming he wanted to smooch with her; but he knew the others were just jealous.

Barbara had asked Michael into her home on more than one occasion to play cards and do homework. Michael had a real puppy love for her. When she told him that she was moving away, he lost all interest in school that day. When he walked home after school, he went straight to his bedroom and cried. His brother Gary walked in and asked him what was wrong. Michael was too embarrassed to tell anyone that losing Barbara had broken his heart. For as long as he could remember, Michael loved the women.

"I just want to help you meet some other people in Harborview before your teaching job begins."

"I have to say, you are quite the gentleman. Actually, I do need to get reacquainted with people in town, so that might be good idea."

With that, Angela placed her hand on Michael's and gave him a soft kiss on the cheek.

"I better get home, Michael. It's starting to get dark outside."

Michael knew all about the old Hutton house, where Angela had just moved. He had grown up with the Hutton boys as neighbors. There were four kids in the family. They were always busy getting in trouble. They had built an electrocution chair in the basement of the house. Melvin Hutton was methodically asking neighbors to come into the basement to try the chair out. Michael was one of the guinea pigs. He climbed onto the converted high chair, and Mel turned the crank on an old military electric generator. Then he pushed the button that released the electric charge to the nails in the seat of the chair. Michael jumped almost four feet into the air and rubbed his rear. He remembered it hurting like hell. Nevertheless, it was funny and appeared to be harmless. Mike had many memories that involved several of the neighbors. Most of his memories were good ones.

Michael asked if he could walk Angela to her door.

"Certainly," she casually replied.

Michael took Angela's hand into his and walked her down the back porch steps and around the side of the house to the front yard sidewalk. The oak tree was to the side of the house and took up over half of the lawn. It had probably been there before Harborview had even become a town. He took the swing and

pushed it as they walked by. The evening sun was almost gone, and a half moon was easy to see in the southern sky.

The front yard had a shrub rose hedge that ran parallel to Oak Street, providing a kind of security fence to the front of Michael's yard. As they walked to the front of Michael's house, they followed the sidewalk as it turned right, then left, and finally toward two sets of steps that went down six feet. The steps were built between the hedges, leading to street level and the main sidewalk.

The hedge was beginning to bud as spring had arrived. Michael recalled cutting his hands on the rose's prickly stems during pruning when he was younger. The flowers always came in as soft pink blossoms. The bushes were full of leaves and blossoms this time of year. Angela and Michael turned left to walk on the main sidewalk toward the Hutton property.

As Michael walked Angela toward her new residence, he could smell her fragrance. It smelled like lavender to Michael. He wondered if it was perfume or her natural scent.

Angela opened the front door with her skeleton key. "Thank you so much, Michael I appreciate you walking with me."

The Hutton house had been constructed sometime in the 1920s, and both front and back doors still had skeleton key locks.

"My pleasure," he replied.

"Would you like to come in for a moment and see what I've done to the inside of the house?"

Michael walked inside. Just beyond the front door were plants that were vibrant green and healthy looking. Michael wondered how Angela had gotten the four-foot-square gazebo into the living room, where it sat on the south side. Inside and around the fixture were houseplants of all kinds. The plants made the air smell fresh. There were shades of green, burgundy, and red in the plants, beautifying the living space. The furniture gave a soft panoramic feel of nature combined with leisure as Michael turned to view the entire living room. A long white leather sofa and love seat sat against the northwest corner of the room, and a tall, darkly stained armoire, with ornate details of flowers and vines along the top, stood against the wall in the adjacent dining room. The furniture was diverse, yet it went together.

Angela had taken a decorative pattern and changed the entire ceiling. It looked like something one might see in a cathedral. The patterns gave a three-dimensional effect, as if timbers ran from one side of the room to the other. The designs were ornate and filled with flower patterns done in black with a light-green background. The west wall was a collage of antique mirrors. The mir-

rors made the room look much larger than it actually was. The top of the other three walls was stenciled with a black transitional border. It had been placed four inches from the top of the ceiling and drew the eyes toward the ornate ceiling. Michael had never seen the old Hutton house look so good. Angela had a wonderful creativity in her decorating. Everything was practical yet looked very expensive.

"Please sit down. I'd like to show you my Persian cat and my parakeet."

The introduction to so much of Angela's life was having a profound effect on Michael. He felt his knees getting weak as he realized Angela could be trying to seduce him.

"My cat's name is Cleo, and I call my parakeet Cheops because he reminds me of the Egyptian king who ruled during the fourth (Memphite) dynasty, over forty-five centuries ago."

Angela was very articulate when she wanted to be. She was refreshing. Michael found himself giving control over to her. Angela did not talk excessively; but when she did speak, she always had something interesting to say. Yet, she had not shown Michael the extent of her vocabulary.

"My plants are living beings. The spider plants get special attention. The babies cluster as plantlets on the vines, and the long, narrow, variegated leaves are so beautiful. She stopped speaking for a moment and smiled at Michael.

"I have wine. Would you like some before you go?" she inquired.

The windows in the living room were open. While a cool breeze blew through the room, Cheops, the parakeet, ruffled his feathers and paced across the cage.

"Angela, have you ever read *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, by Maya Angelou?"

"Yes, I have read it. It's about a black girl named Maya. She grows up in a community filled with prejudice. She is, at first, idealistic and happy, full of curiosity about the beauty in life. However, her environment eventually causes her to retreat from people and situations. She resigns herself to the harshness of the racism she lives with in the community of Stamps. What made you ask that question?"

"For some reason, I thought of your bird Cheops and the way he seems to be happy in spite of being caged. But, I think his situation is a great deal better than Maya's," Michael smiled.

She sat down and handed Michael a crystal goblet with a blend of Chardonnay and Torrente's wine. The wine was a pale straw color. It had a citrus aroma and was sweet on the palate.

"I'm not a wine connoisseur. I like my beer. But this is great."

"Maybe we can start the housewarming party tonight." Angela slid her light-blue, smooth-leather shoes from her feet. Then she crossed her legs and leaned back, gazing at Michael.

"Are you seeing anyone right now?" she inquired.

"No, I ended my last relationship about three months ago. I was going to ask you the same question. You have been so assertive, in a nice sort of way. I know little about you, Angela, yet you seem to know so much about me. Am I just guessing or is there any truth in what I just said?"

"Yes, I suppose some of what you said is correct. I've wanted to meet you for some time. Now that we are neighbors, I hope we can be close friends."

Michael wanted to kiss her. Somehow, he thought she knew it. He tried to keep his composure as he rolled the wine in the goblet. Then he took his finger and dipped it in the wine. He ran his finger around the crystal glass and a musical hum got louder and louder. The cat ran from the room, and Michael laughed.

"I learned to do that on crystal when I was about nine years old. It got so loud once that the glass broke from the vibration."

"You have a mischievous side, don't you?"

"I like to have fun when I can," Michael said in a teasing tone.

"Now that you chased my cat from the room, why not try to make me purr?" Angela spoke in a soft and enchanting voice.

"You are being forward, Angela, but I like it. You're refreshing and a new lift to my situation. I feel like I have known you from before."

Michael leaned forward and touched his lips to hers. He could smell her sweet breath, and her lips felt soft, like rose petals or fine silk.

Angela sat her wine glass on the table and slid her hand behind Michael's head and through his hair. Her body grew warm, as the cheeks on her face became slightly red. The air was full of passion. It was intense. For Angela, it had been one continuous orgasm since her initial moments with Michael. Or it seemed that way in Michael's mind.

It seemed like an eternity since Michael had kissed such a beautiful woman. He had been seeing Patty Appleton recently. However, she was just an occasional sex partner. Michael felt it was unlikely the relationship with Patty would ever go anywhere.

Angela slid down on the sofa and ran her fingers across Michael's chest. Michael knew Angela was aroused as she squirmed and rubbed her legs together.

Michael was aroused, too. It was difficult to conceal.

Angela's breasts were protruding from the top of the white blouse. The buttons were barely keeping her package together.

Michael sat back. "I don't know about you, Angela, but my feelings for you have been so intense since we first met that I am mystified by it. We haven't seen the real action yet, but I'm ready to explode now."

Angela did not admit it, but she had the same feelings for him. "Would you like to help me pick out something to wear tomorrow to dinner, Michael?"

Angela led Michael by the hand. They went up the staircase and into her bedroom. The bed was queen size, and it had a pink canopy. As with the living room, Angela had spent time adding meticulous detail to the room, designing the top border of the walls with a repeating, Greek classic block motif. The walls were an equal combination of light blues and red, all in one-inch dots. Looking straight at the walls, the surfaces looked like magenta.

"It looks like you did your entire room in an impressionist style. I can see the magenta color when I look right at the wall. However, when I look closer, I can see you have light blue and red mixed in small dots. How could you possibly do that?"

"I learned that style in art class. You use two separate paints. It took some time. Do you like the effect?"

"Yes, it's very impressive."

Angela slid the closet door open. She turned around and put her arms around Michael's neck, slid her tongue into his mouth, and rolled it around his.

Michael pressed his body against Angela's as she backed against the wall.

She was hot, wet, and very aroused. Slowly she unzipped her skirt. It dropped to the floor. She was a size two and stood five-feet tall. Angela had to stand on her tiptoes to kiss Michael. He was six-feet tall, with a slender, masculine build.

After kissing for several minutes, Angela turned to look in the closet and held out a red satin teddy for Michael to see.

"Do you like the ruffles?" she asked.

"It would look better on you, than the hanger."

"Would you like to watch me put it on?" she replied.

Michael was enjoying the moment too much to answer. He nodded his head in approval.

Angela walked over to the mirror, which was attached to a large, colonial dresser.

She had a thong that barely covered her. After she unbuttoned the remaining buttons on her blouse, her silk bra looked as if it had been made just for her breasts. She had 34C cups, and her waist was only twenty inches. Michael had

already undressed. Angela slid off her bra and thong. Angela turned around and looked into the mirror. She slid her hands from her waist up to and around her breasts. Her nipples were hard.

Michael saw her erect nipples and, with eyes wide open, said, "You've got the most beautiful set of tits I've ever seen. Are they real?"

"They're all mine," she replied.

She moved her hands from her breasts to between her thighs, gazing into the mirror where she could see herself and, behind her, Michael in the bed.

"Do you really think I'm pretty?" she asked, as she turned to look at Michael. She slid her teddy on slowly to intensify the moment. She helped each breast into the outfit while she watched his eyes.

Angela was provocative, in a good sort of way.

"You are pretty. How'd you get such an athletic body?"

"I did gymnastics most of my life, and I'm built like my mother," she replied.

"I try to maintain a healthy diet, too."

"I was a tomboy when I lived on Renton Street, as tough as the guys were over there. They tried to get rough with me. But it always backfired since I didn't back down from a fight." Angela sounded proud of her strength and persuasive power.

She walked over to Michael, pretended to kiss her finger and put it to Michael's lips. She was a real tease. She stood at the side of the bed and stretched her arms overhead as if she was sliding long gloves off. She was doing a striptease for Mike.

Michael kissed her hand and followed up her arm.

Angela bent down and kissed him back.

"Maybe I'll give you a lap dance, Michael. Would you like that?"

"We can save that for another time. I just want you in bed with me now," he responded.

Angela slid between the pink, flowered quilt and the bed sheet. She wrapped her arms around Michael, as she took the ponytail out of her hair. Her hair rolled side to side, then fell down to her shoulders.

"Michael, I want you, and I can see you want me."

"Let's make love. I think we've both waited long enough" he said as he lay next to her.

"You have no idea how long I've waited for you," Angela groaned.

"I didn't think I'd find anyone as wonderful as you," he responded.

The night was full of passion. They each moaned and hoped it would never end. They tried to devour each other. When it was over, Michael held Angela the rest of the night.

The next morning, Michael woke to find Angela had made him quiche filled with egg, mushroom, and cheese.

"I think we are going to make good neighbors, Michael," Angela smiled.

Michael knew he would never forget their first night together.

Just then, the phone rang. It was the neighbor, Jeff Holt.

"Michael, did you know you're late for work?"

"Thanks for calling. But how did you get this number?"

"Well, I tried your place and got no answer. So I got hold of Marlene at the telephone company and told her it was kind of an emergency. Sorry if I interrupted something." Jeff laughed as if he knew what had taken place.

"Not at all, thanks for calling, Jeff." Michael hung up the telephone.

"That damn Jeff was snooping on us last night; I just know it," Michael said as he shook his head in disbelief.

With trepidation, Michael said goodbye to Angela and headed to work. He was already thinking about being with her again that night as he drove out of town.

Chapter 2

Michael worked at the beryllium plant. He was an electrician. Beryllium-based products were used in aerospace and had military applications. Michael's job was to keep the smelting machines in good order so the liquid ores would fuse together properly.

Beryllium was a unique element because of its bonding properties and its malleability. The beryllium ore was known to be hazardous to workers because it could cause lung cancer and other chronic ailments if it got into the person's system. Michael had to wear a separate uniform after he entered the facility because of possible airborne beryllium particles.

In the three years that he had worked at the BerAl plant, he had developed some skin rashes on his arms. He had to take oatmeal baths occasionally, to help soothe his skin as well as heal the rash.

Michael had known about the plant outside of town since he was a young boy growing up in Harborview. He would often walk the four miles to the Elliston Bridge. The bridge was adjacent to the facility. Sometimes, he would stop to watch forklifts bring ingots of beryllium ore to the loading area in the front of the plant. Other times, he saw wooden pallets holding the ingots being loaded onto a special semi truck trailer.

The plant was just a few yards from the bridge. At the bridge, he would inch his way down along the side and to the river below.

Under the bridge, there were plenty of small crawfish. They made excellent bait for fishing in Crane River and Lake Erie. He reminisced about his youth,

which was mostly carefree. He came from a big family, four brothers and one sister. Only he and his sister, Emily, still lived in the town.

His father was a journeyman electrician who had learned his trade in the United States Navy. He had been stationed on the USS *West Virginia* when it was still in New York harbor.

The *West Virginia* was a battleship. It began its trek through the Panama Canal and to its newly appointed port, along the island of Oahu, Hawaii.

While the sailors were getting ready to go ashore on the morning of December 7, 1941, an alarm sounded on the ship for all hands to man their battle stations.

At first, his father thought it was a call to 'Fire and Rescue', but the announcement was made again. Sailors ran to the battle stations as they heard a loud buzz of planes overhead. It appeared like a dark cloud moving in from the north, but they were Japanese Zeros and dive-bombers sent by the Japanese Imperial Navy to kill Americans and to cripple the naval station.

The American Sailors, although well trained had never seen real combat before. Sailors and Marines alike felt a great anxiety as they realized they were staring death in the face. Honolulu, which was on the mainland of Hawaii, was every military staff's dream vacation spot. Now the Japanese attack was turning the island into an inferno. As bombs exploded, men's flesh was torn and many cried out for their mothers as their lives slipped away. Political differences between Japan and America may have provoked hostilities. However, it was the lives of the young men and women that were paying the price with their own blood.

Michael's father rushed topside to get to his station in gun turret three. This had three massive eighteen-inch guns that could hurl a thousand-pound shell of high explosives over ten miles. The vessel had been constructed in the 1920s. Although it was a finely tuned piece of weaponry, the *WeeVee*, as it was referred to by its crew, was outclassed by some of the more modern Japanese battleships.

Michael's father, Mel, had been preordained to be present in an event that would become, as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt would soon say, "a date which will live in infamy."

During the Japanese aerial attack on Pearl Harbor, Melton Simon found himself trying to direct eighteen-inch guns against a barrage of planes carrying bombs and torpedoes. The Japanese carrier-based fighter aircraft seemed to take great delight in killing civilian and sailor alike with their seven- and thirteen-millimeter machine guns. When the attack was over, the *West Virginia* was sinking, and dozens of sailors were already dead. Hundreds more lay dying on deck and in the water.

The *WeeVee* had taken five torpedo hits, running nearly the length of the ship's port side. The ship also received at least three bomb strikes on the upper structure. Destiny had spared Melton's life when a five hundred pound bomb came through turret three and did not detonate. It was a dud.

The *WeeVee* began listing to port by twenty degrees.

Then a order came through: "Central station says abandon ship!"

During the death and destruction, there was never the slightest sign of faltering or cowardice among the ship's crew. They fought with valor against overwhelming odds.

The ship's commanding officer, Captain Mervyn S. Bennion, was at his post on the bridge when struck by a bomb fragment that caused a mortal wound. He clung to life long enough to give the command to abandon ship. Captain Bennion was given the Medal of Honor posthumously.

Melton spent three days on the island of Oahu, in an auditorium, sleeping on bleachers. Then, he and his buddy Smiddy volunteered to board the *MacDonough*, a destroyer, and they spent the next four years of their lives searching for Japanese to destroy.

If the United States Navy had failed its mission in the Pacific, the odds were in favor of losing World War II.

Michael's father participated in eighteen battle star campaigns during World War II. A battle star campaign was a significant engagement with enemy forces, in which members of that branch of service were put in harm's way.

Melton Simon found his Navy deployment took him from Rabaul, the Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, and the Gilbert Islands to the Aleutians. It was a zigzag, back and forth, up and down journey over the Pacific Ocean, crossing the equator several times.

Toward the end of the war with Japan, his ship participated in a classic "cross the T" action while stationed in Leyte Gulf. Crossing the T was every ship captain's dream. Getting his ships into this position meant the fleet commander could bring all of his guns to bear down on the enemy without allowing the enemy to fire back effectively.

The United States fleet raked fire at the bow and the stern of the Japanese ships. The Japanese ships were weaker at these points, since their sides were more heavily armored.

The moment Japan attacked the United States, Americans changed from an attitude of pacifism to one of aggressor.

Japanese Admiral Yamamoto was prophetic when he said "I fear all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve."

After World War II, Michael's father met Lita, the love of his life. Lita was Michael's mother. She had been raised in a small town named Risingsun and was the only daughter of five children. Lita had learned to keep order in the home at an early age and had taken on the responsibilities of raising her brothers in part because both of her parents worked.

Lita Simon was a woman of principle and a wonderful mother. She was meticulous in raising her children with love and understanding. Mrs. Simon brought six children into the world. Every child was made to feel like her favorite. As any parent would know, this was no easy task.

Love for his mother and respect for his father turned Michael into a strong but compassionate adult. It was this balanced upbringing that compelled Michael to serve his country in the United States Navy, just as his father had before him.

Michael left the town of Harborview in the fall of 1974, shortly after graduating from high school. He entered the Navy in the fall. After basic training at the Great Lakes Naval Station, Michael was stationed on the *Enterprise*. Many at that time considered this huge aircraft carrier to be the best in the naval fleet.

Michael had no doubt the *Enterprise* was the most magnificent seagoing vessel he had ever seen. It was like a floating city. In fact, the ship had all the amenities of a city on the move. This, however, did not diminish the fact that it had a floating armada of planes, jets, munitions, guns, and other exotic weapons, some being nuclear.

The *Enterprise* was commissioned for service in November of 1961. This mega structure was built in the Newport News, Virginia, shipbuilding facility. Michael had received special training in electronics and communications. He had learned the operation of several key components of the carrier as well as several electronic devices used on the various aircraft. He was always cautious about going onto the deck. Dozens of crew members dressed in various colored shirts were doing a perpetual dance on and around the flight deck every minute, every hour, day and night. It was a sight to behold.

Growing up in a small town had not prepared Michael for the intensely diverse environment of an aircraft carrier, except for one thing. He was a calm and patient person, capable of intense focus. That was why he made a good sailor on this floating goliath.

Michael was particularly impressed with the F-14 Tomcat. To him, it looked like something out of a science fiction movie. The Grumman F-14 was a two-seated, carrier-based, strike aircraft. Its two Pratt and Whitney turbofan engines gave it twenty thousand pounds of static thrust, allowing it to climb fifty thousand feet per minute. The Tomcat could carry fourteen thousand five hun-

dred pounds of external stores beneath the fuselage and wing rack, including missiles and bombs for an extensive variety of uses.

Jacob Carver was one of the F-14 pilots and a friend to Michael. After asking permission through the proper channels, Jacob was able to let Michael sit in the cockpit of his F-14. After that, Michael was determined that one day he would fly an aircraft. It didn't matter to him if it was just a light aircraft like a Piper Cub.

The naval brass had approached Michael several times to encourage him to make the Navy his career. He enjoyed his time as a sailor, but he longed for home and a simpler life.

Michael received his discharge from the Navy in November of 1982, as a Petty Officer first class. He had served in the Navy for eight years. Three red stripes and an eagle, worn on the left sleeve of his uniform, showed his rank. He was proud of his military duty but did not often talk about it.

Eight of Michael's high school classmates had gone into the armed forces shortly after graduating from high school. All but one returned unharmed. However, one classmate, Willy Bedford, a fellow football teammate, was killed while on liberty. Michael didn't hear about Will's demise until his discharge. Will had been off base, in the Philippines, and was enjoying the nightlife there. The story Michael received was that a small band of local criminals had jumped and stabbed Will. He had lingered in and out of a coma for ten days before he expired. Michael had a gut feeling that he would never hear all the facts about Will's death.

Although Michael had made a lot of friends in the Navy, he now had mixed feelings about how technology was being used in war.

Michael had been daydreaming to divert attention away from the heat inside the Beryllium plant. He was glad when he left at five o'clock and was heading home.

Doug Overton, a friend since high school, had left a message for Michael on his answering machine. Doug grew up on a farm about three miles north of town. He had inherited the property he lived on, from his father. The property had 180 acres of some of the richest topsoil in the Midwest. Doug used some commercial products on his fields each season. However, because of his crop rotation and the quality of the soil, Doug always got good produce returns with only minor fertilizer use.

Doug had attended Ohio State University and majored in Agricultural Science. He met his wife, Kathy, while attending college. Kathy was a pretty coed who had been majoring in education. Their paths crossed when they both went with friends to watch the Ohio State football games. Doug also liked living in Harbor-

view. So, he brought his new wife back with him to live and work on the family farm.

"Hey Kath, what's up?" Michael asked Kathy, as she answered the call to Doug.

"Doug wanted me to tell you that he had a few hours to go fishing after he got done in the fields this afternoon," she replied.

"Did you hear the new English teacher, Angela Beth, moved into the Hutton place?" Michael asked.

"I heard that she had gotten her degree in teaching. But, I wasn't aware she had come back to Harborview."

"She's back *and* single," Michael quipped.

"Are you ready for a new love interest after Julie broke your heart?" Kathy inquired.

Michael paused for a moment. He was not ready to tell anyone that he and Angela had already had a night of passion.

"I'm not sure on that question, Kath. Maybe she and I can be friends since we live close. Tell Doug I'll have to save that fishing invitation for another time. I have plans for this evening."

"Okay, I'll tell him. Catch ya later!"

Michael had been looking out of his kitchen window, toward Angela's new abode. He wanted to catch a glimpse of her.

Since it was time to walk the dog, he bent down and put the leash on Tess, his golden retriever. Tess was a calm, gentle, and affectionate pet. She kept the environment in his home calm. Tess had long reddish-blond hair that Michael tried to keep groomed. Tess led Michael out the back door and toward Halley Street, where they usually walked several blocks every day. Tess's tail was swinging back and forth. She put her nose in the air and to the ground to sample the various smells that were common to spring. Fresh cherry and apple blossom fragrances were in the air. The hay mill south of town wasn't processing now; that plant always gave Michael bouts of hay fever and itchy eyes.

As Michael and Tess walked to the corner of Oak and Halley Street, Blaine Sexton, the cemetery caretaker asked Michael if he knew where Dan was. Dan had been Michael's friend since third grade. He was a hard-living character. Michael had not seen much of Dan, since he had moved to South Crane Road. He and his wife Amy had three kids. Dan seemed to be gone most of the time.

"No, Mr. Sexton I haven't seen Dan in a few weeks. But I'll let you know if I do."

With that, Mr. Sexton discarded a rock that had been thrown from the driveway separating the two properties and walked away.

Mr. Sexton was a hard worker and was up at six o'clock in the morning, rain or shine. He drove a red Ford pickup that everyone in town recognized. Doris, Mr. Sexton's wife worked part time at Mel's Food Market and the family always had plenty to eat. Doris had a regular habit of making a huge bowl of popcorn for Friday nights. There was only one problem with that. Friday night was drinking night for Dan and his friends. After all the bars closed, Dan and a friend would come back to the house to raid his dad's beer. It was kept in the basement refrigerator. On the way to the basement, they would grab the popcorn and take it with them. By the time everyone was ready to go to bed, it was often early Saturday morning. Only a few kernels of burnt popcorn were left for Doris. Occasionally, Doris would tell Dan not to let his friends eat the popcorn. But, her words went in one ear and out the other.

Dan was the youngest of four kids and seemed to get all the breaks. Blaine took a great deal of interest in this son. Perhaps he was doing what many parents do by favoring the youngest. Dan was not a bad kid growing up. He was active in neighborhood activities such as baseball, basketball, football, swimming, girl watching and eventually drinking. When he was learning to drive, he used his mother's black 1964 Ford Falcon. This was the first time Michael had heard the term "vapor lock" to explain why it stopped running from speed shifting. Dan had the kind of life that could make a B-rated movie. Perhaps something with a plot like *Night of the Living Dead*.

Blaine got his son a nearly new, 1965 Corvair, which could plow through snowdrifts six feet high. Dan proved that, even though it was a car, it could still fly. Then came the '67 GTO, which Dan received when the song of the same persuasion was popular: "Little GTO."

It was either a death wish or a touch of Evel Knievel in Dan that gave him a license to drive like a lunatic. "You're gonna drive me to drinkin', if you don't stop driving that hot rod Lincoln" was one of Dan's favorite song lyrics. They said drinking and driving didn't mix. With Dan, that was an understatement.

One Saturday morning, Michael got up only to see the GTO with the driver's door missing. Dan had driven the car into a ditch. When it was getting pulled out, someone forgot to shut the driver's side door.

When his friend Lou got married, Dan tore the axle and transmission out of his GTO trying to negotiate a curve while drinking from a pitcher of beer. He was the first guy in the group to try an ether injection setup on his carburetor.

Dan had enlisted to go into the U. S. Air Force. He spent four years being trained in something—no one was quite sure what. When he was discharged, he returned to Harborview more aloof than before.

“That Dan has been a character ever since we were kids,” Michael said in a low tone to his dog, Tess.

Michael had to lean forward as he walked from Oak to Birch because of the incline. Birch Street was where the Catholic church was located. Lutheran and Methodist churches were on the adjacent street. Michael remembered as a kid going to catechism on Saturdays. When he walked by the Lutheran church the kids would yell, “Redneck.” For the longest time, Michael thought redneck and Catholic pretty much meant the same thing.

When he went to catechism, he got all A’s until third grade. Then the grade card contained comments like, “Michael is being disruptive to the other students,” and the letter grade dropped.

Michael thought about his instruction at St. Anthony’s Catholic School. Those Nuns were mean cusses. They followed the old rule of instruction. Getting whacked on the back of the knuckles or a swat to the back of the head seemed to be reserved for the boys. Michael figured the Nuns were just plain angry because they never had any fun themselves.

As Michael had gotten older, he realized there were several things about his religious teaching that had filled him with dogmas. The religious doctrine of Catholicism, which he had been brought up to believe, was changing by the day. When he was a boy, he couldn’t miss Mass on Sunday because that was a mortal sin. He also had been required to fast overnight to receive communion. He remembered some of his friends saying that Catholics worshipped the statues at the front of the church. Lutherans said he worshipped Mary as much as he worshipped Jesus. Even as a kid, Michael did not take the teasing very seriously. But, he found his instructors disingenuous when they kept changing the doctrines to keep parishioners from leaving.

It was time for Michael to head back home with Tess. He had invited Angela to dinner at 7:30 that evening and didn’t want to be late for their first official date. Michael brushed Tess’s hair before they went into the house. Tess helped to mellow him out. She was sweet all the time. Tess went to her suede dog couch and started chewing on her cowhide bone.

Michael was getting nervous as the time got closer. What would he wear? He decided on a cobalt blue tee, navy blue briefs, burgundy canvas shirt, and khaki cotton slacks. They looked like a good match with his slip-on leather shoes. He

was going casual all the way. Michael had disdain for formal attire. Maybe he had gotten too much of it going to church.

"Angela, is it still a date tonight?" Michael asked on the telephone.

Angela laughed and replied, "I have been waiting all day to see what your culinary tastes are."

"We can ride into town in my car or walk. It's just two blocks from here to the restaurant. I am wearing slacks and a casual shirt. I hope you don't mind."

"The outfit sounds fine to me. Walking to the restaurant would be fun, too. Pick me up in fifteen minutes, Michael." Angela hung up the phone.

Michael paused, smiled, then went and turned on the front porch light.

"I wonder if she wants kids," he thought.

Michael had been on the dating scene for a long time and wanted to settle down. However, he still wanted to be able to hunt, fish, and be allowed to participate in some occasional mischief.

Angel's front door had a doorbell that required manual turning to ring. Michael peeked into the living room through the curtains on the front door. Angela was sitting at the dining room table. He rang the doorbell.

"That was quick," Angela said, as she opened the door and hugged Michael.

Angela had on a light-blue, cashmere, long-sleeve sweater, sunset-purple cashmere scarf, boot-cut indigo jeans, and black sport sandals.

"We look good together, don't yah think, Michael?"

Angela closed and locked her front door. Michael took her hand as they walked to the front sidewalk. She had spent most of the day unpacking and folding up shipping boxes. She had just enough blush on to highlight her cheekbones, and her eyes were piercingly beautiful. They crossed over to South Street and walked toward Main.

Just then, a dark-blue '67 GTO drove up next to the curb.

"Mike, this a new friend of yours?" Dan Sexton asked.

"This is my new neighbor, Angela. She moved into the old Hutton place. You should remember that house. We played army there often enough. By the way, your dad was asking if I had seen you. Your GTO looks good, considering all the repair work it received in the first few years of its life."

"I just came from my parents' house. He wants me to help him out at the cemetery. Business is up. People are just dying to get in."

"Doug called me to go lake fishing. Do you want to join us if we go sometime this week?"

"I need a break. Call me." With that, Dan sped away toward downtown.

Michael thought about the time he and Dan had watched a neighbor climb to the top of a thirty-foot oak tree. At first, they didn't know what he was doing. Just as the neighbor had reached the top of the tree, he inched his way over. Without a seeming interest for privacy, he proceeded to drop his drawers and take a crap. Just as the first feces fell, a tenant in an adjacent apartment got an eyeful while walking up her staircase. She screamed, ran up the stairs, and slammed the door.

Mike began to laugh.

"What's so funny?" Angela asked.

"Oh I just thought of an incident that occurred when I was a kid. I'll tell you about it some other time."

Michael opened the door for Angela as they entered Tony's Restaurant. Tony's, like many of the businesses in Harborview, was located on Main Street. It was a small restaurant that seated up to twenty-four, according to the occupancy notice on the wall. Angela slid into the side of the booth.

The restaurant consisted of an island that had a rectangular countertop, with swivel bar stools, fifties style, secured along both outside edges of the island for individual customers. Dinner booths ran along the west wall. The server came out from between the two islands to greet customers in the booths. The seats were covered in red vinyl. Condiment dispensers included nostalgic yellow plastic for mustard and red for ketchup.

The countertop had been done in a beautiful red-flake vinyl. A classic hot-dog steamer sat near the front of the counter. A wall-mounted, cadmium-plated bottle opener was adjacent to the stainless steel milk cooler. The cook's window was against the back wall. Angela looked around the store. Mike thought about all the shrimp baskets he used to order over that counter when he was a teenager.

"I came here sometimes when I was a teenager," Angela commented.

"I wish I would have met you back then. What are you hungry for, Angela?"

"I have not had a chocolate shake in a long time," she replied. "The hamburger basket and fries looks good."

"What would you folks like?" asked Mary Campley, the waitress. Mary was a big woman, and the restaurant still made her wear the white waitress hat. She had on a dark skirt with the white restaurant apron covering the front of her dress. A small spot of mustard was noticeable on her apron.

"I'll have the shrimp basket, and my friend would like a chocolate shake with your hamburger basket and fries," Mike replied.

Tony's had been a regular hangout for Mike growing up. He remembered when a small bag of chips, a 3V cola, and a hot dog cost less than fifty cents. Not much had changed in Tony's since the 1960s.

Angela raised the question, "Have you lived in Harborview all of your life, Michael?"

"Yeah, Harborview really is home to me. I grew up here, went into the Navy, and then bought my parents' house. They bought a motel in Sandusky, not far from Cedar Point."

"I haven't been to Cedar Point in years. Don't you find it interesting that we lived in the same town all those years and never knew each other?"

"I thought I knew everyone in town. How did you slip by me?" Mike raised the question while he sipped his Coke.

"You and I should go to Cedar Point sometime. They have four roller coasters now," Michael indicated. He gestured with his right hand as if going up and down on a roller coaster. Angela's eyes beamed at the thought of the roller coasters.

Chapter 3

Angela had lived in Dartmouth and attended the University of Massachusetts where she received her Master's of Education. She graduated Summa Cum Laude.

What had brought Angela back to Harborview? She could have gone anywhere in the country and had received dozens of offers. She was beautiful and very intelligent. Mike remembered Angela's older sister, Sharon. Sharon had been a Harborview cheerleader.

Angela was not anything like her sister. Angela had an *air of mystery* about her and seemed to engage in conversation with such ease that it appeared she knew the questions before Mike asked them.

"How long have you been sitting here?" Lenny Rivers asked Mike.

"Lenny, I thought you left for Cleveland. I heard you won a chance to bowl on the amateur bowlers' tour."

"I just got back. I placed third in the tri-state division. There were competitors from Pennsylvania and Indiana. I had a lot of fun. Now my wife wants me to repair the siding on the house from that ice storm back in April."

Michael gave a chortle. "Yeah, she works you like a drill sergeant Lenny."

"This is my new neighbor, Angela."

Lenny politely shook her hand.

"I just came in here to get a bottle of Gatorade. Call me when you get a chance, Mike. It is nice to make your acquaintance, Angela."

Lenny turned and, after a slight wave of his hand, opened the front door and walked out.

Michael had known Lenny since junior high school. Lenny had been raised by his mother. He had endured years of teasing from other kids because he came from a single-parent household. Even the teachers at school had shown a considerable lack of insight toward him. Michael had seen this first hand when one of the coaches called him a “bastard”. Coach Ernie didn’t make the comment because he was angry. He said it in passing while he watched the junior varsity basketball team playing against Genoa. Small town or not, Harborview showed its discrimination. Michael walked home with Lenny that day. When they arrived at his house, Lenny began to sob. When Michael asked him what was wrong, he explained how degraded he felt at being brought up without a father in the home.

Michael remembered how Lenny would slouch in his posture when he was around adults. It was sad how much a few bad words could devastate a person. As for his mother, she was a nurse at the local hospital, working long hours to keep food on the table. Michael was always treated with respect and like a member of the family. He didn’t get that from many other parents. Ironically, when someone you look up to says something unconstructive, it sticks with you. Considering what Lenny had gone through, Mike felt fortunate that they had remained such close friends.

Angela spoke up. “He seems like a very nice person.”

Michael thought about Lenny for a moment then replied, “That guy has had to endure grief from other people for years. It has been over the most ridiculous things. He has come out a stronger person than many people I grew up with, in spite of the cruelty and is a special friend to me. His wife tries to keep him on a short leash. Regardless of how he had been treated growing up, Lenny is very faithful to his family and his friends.”

“The hamburger was great. You took me to the right location for a good meal. They even grilled the inside of the bun. I’m full. Do you want my fries?”

“Thanks, but this shrimp basket is all I can eat. I am going to get a frozen pizza to take back with us. They are made daily here. Do you like anchovies on your pizza, Angela?”

“No, anchovies are a bit too spicy for my palate” Angela replied.

Michael took the napkin and wiped his hands. “Actually, I hate anchovies. It was kind of a joke. I knew a girl who liked those things on her pizza. But, as I recall, she had a thing for tubers, sea cucumbers, and various other saltwater anemones. I tried escargot in a butter sauce and liked it. But the anchovies, forget it!”

Mike and Angela walked out of Tony’s, through the front entrance.

Mike kissed Angela’s hand. “Do you have to get right home?”

"No, what did you have in mind?"

"I wanted to take you for a walk by the river on the old bridge. It's just a block to the south of us."

Angela agreed. She and Mike walked to the Crane River Bridge. The vintage lamps were burning brightly. Mike looked across the bridge. He remembered the old red highway lantern he had in his basement. His brother had lifted it from a highway worksite several years earlier. It had been left in the basement but still worked and was fun to have out when sitting in the backyard. However, it drew mosquitoes, so a citronella candle was always nearby.

They stood on the walkway and held each other. Angela felt secure in Michael's arms.

Michael pointed to the river's edge and said, "There is a path on each side of this bridge that will take you to the edge of the river. You can go swimming or fishing down there."

"I've caught Catfish and Perch many times off this bridge. The train trestle bridge over there to the west was used for risky jumps into the river. When you jump, it's thirty feet down—not for the faint of heart. My brother, Jim did a belly flop, and it knocked the wind out of him."

Angela shivered. "You are making me squirm now."

"It's time for us to head back home anyway. I'll have to be more careful what I say to you. I didn't know that comment would make you queasy."

Angela looked up at Michael. "It wasn't just that comment. I'm getting a little chill standing on the bridge."

The night, was warm and a soft Nor'easter was blowing into their faces as they walked home. The town was quiet, but it felt safe. Harborview was a small community where the streets got rolled up after 10 PM.

Angela's front porch only had one light bulb, which didn't light the porch very well. The house probably needed rewiring because the electricity dated from the 1920s.

"I'm tired, Michael. It's time to turn in early tonight. Do you have a lawn mower? This lawn is getting overgrown."

"Yeah. I'll be glad to come over in the next few days and whack the grass down to size."

"You have been so kind to me, Michael. Keep me in your thoughts." With that, Angela gave Michael a kiss on his lips, picked up her cat, Cleo, and said goodnight.

Michael walked up the hill and onto his property. "I'm glad she thinks I'm sweet. But I'm horny, too. I don't know why I'm complaining. She is right next door if I have a hormone attack."

Michael was also tired. The job had him rewiring a furnace, and he had a full day of work ahead in the morning. As he walked up the hill of his front yard, he thought he saw something from the corner of his eye. As he turned, a dark cat ran to the other side of the Buckeye tree. Its eyes seemed to glow. Perhaps it was his imagination.

"Oh well," he thought, as he walked into the side door. His golden retriever greeted him at the door.

"Oh, babe, I forgot to take you for a walk. Let's just make it a short one down to the elementary school; then it's bedtime for me."

Tess's tail was wagging so hard Mike had to tell her to calm down. She was ecstatic to be outside, sniffing around and checking the neighbors as they walked to the Buckeye Elementary School. However, something was following them; Mike couldn't see it, but he felt it. Just then, something ran up the Walnut tree.

"Holy Toledo! That scared the crap out of me, Tess. It was just a brown squirrel. Must have monsters on my mind or something, maybe a succubus, werewolf, or the boogeyman. Oh, well. Who cares? We're home now."

Michael did not think much of the adrenalin rush as he took Tess into the house. He wanted to call Lenny before it got too late. Lenny and Mike had done a lot of fishing together, and he had helped Mike with basketball before they made the high school varsity team. He was also a drinking buddy. Mike felt he could talk man stuff to Lenny and not have to worry about him keeping his mouth shut.

"Hi, Linda, this is Mike; is Lenny there?"

Linda snapped at Mike, "Don't you realize it's almost eleven o'clock?"

"You're in another good mood, eh, Linda? Well, pardon me!" Mike was amused.

Linda grumbled, as she handed the telephone to Lenny.

"Hey, Mike, what's up?"

Michael laughed quietly. "Lenny, did you see what a fox Angela is? She moved into the Hutton house just two days ago. She said that she went to our high school. Do you remember her? She was supposed to have been three or four years behind us. She is going to teach English at Harborview High School. She's starting in the fall. Well, what did you think? I saw yah staring."

"She's a damn fox. I don't remember anyone that good-looking coming from Harborview. Are you sure she is not an alien or something? Maybe she has put a

spell on you, Mike. Your womanizing days may be over. Did you hear Linda? Her asthma is bothering her, or so she says. She just wants a reason to jump on my case.”

Michael had to watch his comments because Linda sometimes got on the second phone to listen in. “I don’t envy you, bud. How are the boys? I heard your oldest son, Ed, is going to play fast-pitch softball. Are you going to offer to coach?”

“I’m putting in a lot of time at the Chrysler plant. Good money, but I almost didn’t get the time off for the bowling tournament. They are pushing employees to buy a new car from them. I have driven my Ford Falcon too long to give it up for a Chrysler. Yeah, little Ed is going to play softball. I’m not sure about the coaching. Maybe I’ll be a substitute coach. I’m telling you, Mike, you should have come with me to Cleveland. We coulda had a good time going to some topless bars. I drove by the television station in Parma Heights where the *Houlihan and Big Chuck* show was taped. Do you remember all those monster movies we used to watch on Friday nights at two in the morning? Big Chuck Schodowski was just a stagehand who used to write skits for Ernie Anderson. Anderson played Ghoulardi, the host of many of those Shock Theatre thrillers. ‘Cool it, group!’ as Ghoulardi would say. Kids nowadays just do not appreciate the classics.”

“I’m glad I called yah, Lenny. You know how to make me laugh. I’ll try calling you again soon—maybe when Linda is in a better mood.”

Lenny started his hilarious laughing. “Yeah, it’s time for me to give Linda a little shock therapy!”

After Michael got off the telephone, he walked around inside the house. He thought about a lot of things.

Growing up in the house he now occupied had not been all pleasant memories. There was plenty of arguing. Most of it was between the kids. There seemed to be too many kids and not enough parents. He thought about how he had gotten loads of freedom. On the other hand, would anyone have missed him if he hadn’t come home? His mother seemed like she was always the consummate example of the Virgin Mary. Michael had wondered, when he was a kid, how his parents had so many kids. He never remembered hearing his parents have sex. There were no regular exchanges of “I love you” between them. His own experience was that he liked to be told when he was loved, and he liked expressing to other people when he felt love for them.

From the time, his siblings got up in the morning until everyone was asleep at night, the bedlam and pandemonium in the environment was constant. His dad always seemed to be working. When he came home at night he had to discipline

the kids. That gained him the distinct honor of being the peacemaker, using force. It was usually in the form of a paddle. Michael knew a list of families where the same kind of behavior was delegated to a specific parent.

Aside from feeling the negativity of childhood, Michael found more than enough to be thankful for. He was glad he had brothers and a sister with whom he could share his trust. Having the ability to go outside and run around town playing sports with kids from all the different neighborhoods was a good thing. Michael never felt real hate, fear, hunger, abandonment, or prejudice. He was thankful for all the times when he got to interact with his siblings, his friends, and his relatives. Occasionally, cousins from out of state would come to town, and a big family gathering would occur. Those days seemed to have gotten lost somehow. Having seen the way Lenny was treated, being raised in a single-parent environment, made Michael realize how lucky he was. Michael had noticed that there was a changing attitude toward single parent families in the last few years.

Michael also had the unique opportunity to see people as they really were when he had his paper route. A blizzard could roar outside, and still he would deliver the bundle of papered news. In fact, he had been in more than one blizzard and freezing rainstorm, alone and chilled to the bone. Yet, somehow, he always knew he would get through it. There always seemed to be an end in sight. He had confidence. But, he also had humility.

Michael had never been ashamed to admit when he was wrong. He detested people who were unreasonable in their dishonesty. Maybe it was the simplicity of his thinking process. He knew he would never get rich if he had to do so at the expense of someone else's suffering. That was who he was. He loved people. He loved helping others. He had optimism about life, which kept him happy through most situations.

He walked to the window, looked over toward Angela's house, and thought to himself, "My house has four bedrooms upstairs and only one bed. I have more than enough room for a family. Angela seems like the kind of woman who would make a good wife and seems intelligent. Think of the kind of kids we could make together."

Michael enjoyed being a jokester. That was why he had gotten such a kick out of watching Ghoulardi when he was a teenager.

Michael did a mental recall of one of Ghoulardi's skits:

A very tall man walked into a grocery store, and Little John (a short person) was watering the produce. The man walked over to Little John and asked for half a head of lettuce. Little John excused himself, then went to the next aisle

where he saw one of the other stock boys. "Some tall jerk just came up to me in produce and asked for half of a head of lettuce. What do you think of that?" Just then, Little John realized the customer had followed him around the corner. His hair stood on end. Little John turned, pointed to the customer, and said, "And this fine gentleman wants the other half."

Michael looked at Tess and said. "I'm a goofball, and I'm okay with that."

Michael threw his clothes on the bed, showered, then slid into his mahogany sleigh bed. Tess curled up in her own bed near the foot of Michael's. Mike turned the radio on to an all-night talk show called *Mystery Theater*.

Chapter 4

As Michael drifted off to sleep the dream came. It was Grandma Doyle. She was in her early thirties. She had long brown hair and hazel eyes. She took Michael's hand, and they floated through the upstairs window, into a brightly lighted area. Michael felt an overwhelming happiness. He felt unconditional love. Grandma Doyle took him toward two beings that stood in front of a large book. One of them said, "Michael's name is here." With that, Michael and Grandma Doyle floated through a large golden gate. It was surrounded on both sides by a fence that was covered in rubies. The light that emanated was pure and healing.

Once inside the golden gate, Michael met a being he recognized immediately as Jesus. Jesus was the most handsome and powerfully built being he had ever seen. He had a light that surrounded him and gave off all the colors of the rainbow. Jesus wore a robe that reminded Michael of what the ancient Romans might have worn. The guards at the gate also had Roman soldier helmets on. Jesus showed Michael streets made of gold and crystals. Just then, Michael said, "Grandma Doyle isn't with us. Did she get lost?" Jesus called up several guards to go look for Grandma. Michael joked about Grandma getting lost. Jesus told Michael it could be serious if Grandma accidentally got outside of the boundary.

Jesus showed Michael different rooms in Heaven. In one, Michael could hear people moaning and yelling. Jesus would not let Michael go near that room. "They will not listen," Jesus explained. Then they entered a great hall where thousands of people were singing. Michael felt so happy he never wanted to leave Jesus. Then Jesus showed God to Michael. God was over nine feet tall and looked like Jesus' father, only much bigger. Michael could see the entire universe and

understood everything was connected. Unconditional love held the universe together. There was no way to misunderstand. Then Jesus gave Michael a medal from his box of jewels. It said, "God's helper." Then Michael floated back to his bed.

The radio alarm was going off. "Amazing, it was so real!" Michael thought. "I don't want to come back here!" He seemed so filled with joy that he sprang out of bed singing.

Michael realized something was in his hand. He was holding his old St. Michael medal. Some might say he was superstitious. Nevertheless, he had not seen the chain and medal for nearly two years. St. Michael was considered the patron saint of the Armed Forces. The medal had been with Michael through eight years in the Navy, some of which had been very dangerous.

As Michael drove to work, he could not get the vision out of his mind. Never in his wildest dreams did he believe Heaven could be so beautiful. Heaven seemed to have a boundary made of crystal. The crystals appeared solid yet they also were illuminated. Unable to comprehend the exact layout, Michael found it confusing himself when he tried to understand where the Great Hall was along with several other areas he was shown. Furthermore, there were several levels of Heaven, which did not have distinct boundaries. He knew by the vibration and the level of light when he made entry into each level. Michael remembered being in the Great Hall where there were perhaps thousands or millions of people singing songs of praise. The songs rose from the beings up toward the light of God. Every color conceivable to man was painted in a tapestry of the Great Hall. The colors would change as the tones and vibrations of the songs changed. The songs of praise appeared solid as if looking at notes of a song floating into the sky. There was a room of universal truth where all knowledge of the universe could be accessed. Special light beings were given the responsibility to assist others in understanding this knowledge. There also was a birthing room, which was a place for new spirits to be prepared for going to Earth. So too there was a receiving room, where spirits arrived after leaving the Earth and returning to Heaven.

Michael couldn't tell anyone because no one would believe him. Better keep this dream to himself. Nevertheless, he would write it down when he got home from work.

During the lunch break at the plant, a general alarm went off. Michael had to go since he was part of the HAZMAT team. He had received special training on how to handle hazardous materials. HAZMAT was part of the Department of Hazardous Material Safety Administration.

Bobby Craft had fallen in F section. Michael put on his respirator and took along an ABCD classified fire extinguisher. He could see Bob with a barrel on top of him. Two workers had moved the overhead chain and were lifting the barrel off Bobby. The EMS personnel in the plant placed Bob on a flat board, secured his head, and put an oxygen mask on him. He did not look good.

"Bobby, are you okay?" Michael asked, as he helped carry him to the table in the first-aid room.

"Stay with me, buddy! Let me look at your eyes." Michael could feel Bobby's radial pulse, but it was weak and rapid. Bobby's right eye was reacting normally. However, his left eye was not reacting, and it was dilated.

The Bass City Fire Department had been called, but it would take them twenty minutes to get to the plant.

Michael thought, "I wish they would hurry."

Lockwood Funeral Home was first to arrive, with their Ambulance that was a converted station wagon. They had a gas-operated ventilator inside the vehicle. The attendant, Don Sorgs, had trained as a paramedic. There was a small crash cart with drugs for CPR affixed to the wooden box on the wall. They also had IV equipment and a resuscitation bag.

Michael's sweat dripped off his brow. He didn't want to wait for the fire department. "I'll go with Bobby. We can't wait for the Bass City Fire Department. I am afraid Bobby may go into shock."

The day supervisor agreed, and Bobby was lifted to the collapsible gurney and strapped in.

"Call Bob's family and let them know we are going to St. Joseph Hospital in Toledo. We need to go *now*."

Bobby started to moan. He was beginning to wake up. "Can you go any faster?" Michael asked Don's driver, Dave Miller. "The IV is in, and I'm giving him some D5W. We need an open line in case we have to do any IV push drugs," Don remarked.

Don had a protocol sheet that he read aloud to Michael so that they would not leave anything to chance. Michael wrote the answers to measurements as they occurred.

Bobby began to thrash about as he spoke unintelligently.

Michael rechecked the straps on the gurney to make sure he would not slip out.

Dave looked in the rearview mirror and shouted, "Highway Patrol is asking if we need an escort."

"No, we are only twelve miles from the hospital now, Dave," Don responded.

The whole situation was beginning to hit Michael. How did that barrel of solvent fall on Bobby? He could feel his heart pounding as he thought about the worst-case scenario. How could he face Bob's wife? Well, he had that dream last night for a reason. Maybe this was the reason. Michael prayed in silence as he kept Bob's arm steady in the arm board.

Lockwood's orange-striped ambulance pulled up to the emergency room entrance. Michael jumped out of the ambulance and helped Don remove the gurney from the back of the vehicle. They laid the oxygen cylinder next to Bobby's leg and went into the emergency room through the double doors.

Don took his chart to the nurse sitting behind the counter and said, "We were told you knew we were coming from the BerAl Plant in Harborview."

"Yes, we'll put him in room four," the nurse responded.

Margaret was the triage nurse and she added, "I'll get the information from you guys out at the nurses' station."

With that, Michael and Don went to the nurses' station where all the notes, vital signs, and injury reports were given to the attending physician and an emergency room nurse. The gurney and backboard were carried back to the ambulance. After parking the ambulance, the men went to the hospital cafeteria to gather their thoughts.

Michael was thankful they had made it to the hospital without incident. "I'm glad we have people like the two of you in Harborview. You were expedient at getting to the plant and you knew what you were doing, when you transported Bob to the hospital. You are a real asset to the community. I am going to tell the town mayor."

Dave responded. "Thanks, Mike, but we do this kind of thing all the time now. We don't need any public recognition. But, your comment is appreciated."

"I don't say it if I don't mean it, guys."

Michael rubbed his hands together and said, "I could use a cold draft beer right about now. But, I'll settle for a piece of pie and a cup of coffee."

After eating a piece of pie and some sandwiches, the men went back to the emergency room door and peeked in.

Bobby's wife Linda was just coming out of the room where Bobby had been. She was weeping. Michael motioned her to come to the hallway near the waiting room.

Linda sobbed. "He didn't want to go to work today. I told him to go."

"The nurse told me they think he just has a mild concussion. It wasn't your fault, Linda." Michael hugged her.

"I had to leave the girls with my mother-in-law. They are going to keep my husband overnight, and my mother is getting too old to care for the girls by herself."

Michael spoke up. "Don't worry, Linda; if you want to stay here tonight, I will call my neighbor, Angela and see if she has room for them. She is that new teacher, you know?"

Michael went to the pay phone and called Angela. After explaining what had happened, Angela agreed to watch the children for the night. It was Friday, so there would be no school tomorrow.

"Angela would love to watch your daughters. Would you like to speak with her, Linda, before I hang up?"

"Yes, please," Linda replied as Michael handed the phone to her.

Linda wiped the tears from her face. "I feel better about the girls now. Thank you all for getting Bobby up here safely."

Michael smiled. "I told them so, Linda."

The three men headed back to Harborview after checking on Bobby.

"I have to pick my car up from the plant," Michael reminded Don.

After retrieving his Ford Explorer, Michael headed for home.

"Home at last," Michael thought as he pulled into the driveway.

It was nine o'clock, and he could see Angela had nearly all the lights in the house on.

"Angela, I just got home. I need to take a shower and walk the dog. Do you need help with the kids?"

"I would prefer to do this with you, Michael. Are you coming over?"

"I would love to spend time with you. I'll be there shortly."

"Yes, and Michael?"

"What?"

"I really miss you."

Michael liked hearing her say that. "I miss you, too. You are so easy to be with, Angela. See you in a few minutes."

Michael showered and headed out the back door, with Tess pulling him.

Blaine Sexton was on his front porch as Michael started to walk Tess in front of his house. "Something happen at the plant today?"

Michael approached the porch. "Yeah, someone got hurt; but I think he'll be all right. News sure travels in this town. Did you get Dan to give you some help at the cemetery?"

"Yeah, but all he wanted to do was ride the lawnmower. I could have done that myself," Mr. Sexton replied.

Michael tried to muffle his laugh. "I have to go. I'll tell you more tomorrow if I get the chance."

Mr. Sexton was blunt as he spoke again. "You are always running here and running there. I remember when you were that teenager coming over here and drinking all my beer. Never could get you or Dan to work for me."

Michael laughed again. "I drove that lawnmower at the cemetery more than anyone else around here did. I apologize for all the shenanigans I pulled on you when I was growing up."

Mr. Sexton sipped his beer. "That kid of mine, I spoiled him rotten. He don't give two hoots about nobody but himself. You're the only one that ever apologized for anything. Yeah, you were an ornery cuss. Yah probably got it from your ol' man. But I like yah 'cause you're honest. You can come over sometime and drink a beer with me. I know you're not scared of me anymore when I take my dentures out and click 'em together. Now get, before I throw this bottle at yah."

Michael liked 'ol Blaine, sober or drunk, because he was real. Nothing phony about him.

"Goodnight, Mr. Sexton."

Tess had been roaming around between the houses while Mr. Sexton was talking. She was ready to go back in, and so was Michael.

Michael knocked on Angela's front door. "Thank you for taking the kids on such short notice."

"The girls are almost asleep. They have been talking to my parakeet, Cheops, and chasing my cat, Cleo, around the house. Would you like some popcorn?" "Some popcorn would be great."

Michael smiled as he sat on the sofa, "I like your hair braided like that. You look like a priestess. All you need now is a sterling silver pentacle with moons and stars on it."

Angela came over to Michael and looked at him with her enchanting eyes. "Michael, you are putting me in *that* mood again, and I need to concentrate on watching the girls."

"Please don't lose that thought. I am a patient man when it comes to the finer things in life."

Angela waved her hand in front of her face, as if to cool off, "I drove to the school today and met the principal, Paul Fillmore. He gave me a tour of the school, and we went over the employee forms. Mr. Fillmore asked me why such an academically talented teacher would come to Harborview. I didn't know what to say."

"I have the next two months free before I have to teach in the fall. They are starting my salary now, though."

Michael could feel his energy diminishing. He sank into the sofa and began to close his eyes. "I'm so tired I could fall asleep on your couch right now, Angela."

Little Heather Craft ran down the stairs and said, "Mr. Simon, this house is fun to play in. See? I'm holding Cleo."

Michael opened his eyes and acted alert. "Heather, your mom wanted me to tell you and Heidi she loves you and will call and speak to you in the morning."

Heather stood next to the couch and asked, "Is Daddy really sick? Mommy said he was sick, Mr. Simon."

Michael was not sure how to explain to the girls what had happened. He just smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

Angela hugged little Heidi and with a smile said, "It's that time for you girls to use the bathroom and get to bed."

"Can you read us a story?" Heidi asked.

Angela replied, "Get in bed and I will be right there."

Angela whispered to Michael, "I love children and those two are so sweet. If I have children I want two little girls."

Angela went to the girls' bedroom and sat at the bedside. She tucked the girls in and gave them a kiss. Then she said, "You will like this one. *Goodnight Sleepy Squirrel* is the name of this story. My mother read this to me when I was a child."

Michael turned the television on and found a movie called *Planet of the Apes*. It was a story of an astronaut crew that had landed on a planet in the future where apes were the dominant species. Humans were being chased and captured by the apes to be used as slaves. Mike thought he could fall asleep fast watching this one.

Angela spoke while coming down the stairs. "The little angels are asleep. Are you awake, Michael?"

Michael's eyes were red. He looked up and smiled, "Yeah, but you better hurry and make that popcorn because I need you next to me to snuggle. This is a scary movie."

Cheops started chirping as if he understood Michael. Then he raced back and forth across his perch.

"I'm going to call Linda and let her know the girls are asleep, so she has less to worry about. Do you want to talk to her, Michael?"

"Yeah, I want to ask her how Bobby is doing."

Michael held the telephone to his ear.

"Hi, Michael, this is Linda."

"Linda, did Bobby wake up yet?"

Linda replied, "I feel so much better. Bobby is sitting up in bed. They didn't see any fractures on his X-rays. Thank you for asking. I really appreciate you riding up to St. Joseph Hospital with Bobby. You didn't have to do that."

"He would have done the same for me. I am just thankful Bobby will be okay. Goodnight, Linda." Michael handed the telephone back to Angela.

Angela and Linda spoke for a few minutes. Then Angela brought a bowl of popcorn into the living room and sat down next to Michael.

"People look different in Heaven. But you still know who they are," Michael blurted.

Angela was puzzled. "What did you just say, Michael?"

Exhausted from the last few days, he was drifting in and out of a deep sleep. He was asleep but not, a sort of waking sleep. He was in the realm of REM sleep. Somewhere between beta and theta in his brainwaves, Michael was recalling his mystical dream of Heaven.

Michael murmured, "Jesus, show her our spiritual body. It retains all the beauty that our soul has but yet has our very best features."

Michael did not know he was talking aloud. He was replaying in his mind parts of what he had dreamt about the night before. He was also talking to people who had departed from this existence. He could fly and was transfixed on all the happiness, love, and singing he had experienced in the Great Hall.

Michael put his arm over his forehead. "The whole thing makes perfect sense."

Angela ran her fingers through Michael's hair. "Michael, you are talking in your sleep."

Michael opened his eyes and stared blankly. He didn't know where he was or who this person was. He sat up with bloodshot eyes and looked around. Then it came to him. Embarrassed, he tried to act as though he had total composure.

He thought to himself, "A handful of popcorn. She won't know I was asleep if I eat some popcorn."

He reached his hand into the bowl and nearly tipped it over. His hand was not listening to what his brain was saying. Michael began to laugh as he realized he had lost his bluff.

He asked, "Was I asleep?"

Angela thought it was funny. "It seems so. You were talking about dead people."

"It must have been that *Planet of the Apes* movie," Michael replied.

Michael did not want to tell anyone about the dream he had. It had not been the first one, but it was the most profound to date.

Michael was awake now. "Do you always smell so good? You smell like lavender, Angela. It is a fragrance I remember from the English lavender bushes that dot my property and the open field in the back."

Angela decided to pick Michael's brain, "Did you know they used lavender to relax people? Even in early Egyptian times, Cleopatra was known to have slept on pillows filled with rose petals. Many believe lavender was used the same way."

Michael responded with a joke. "What kind of gum do cats prefer?"

"I don't know where this going, Michael," Angela smiled.

"Double Mint. It gives them an extra life and teases their palate at the same time. Did you know catnip is really made from a perennial herb of the mint family?"

Angela was one step ahead, "*Nepeta cataria* is the Latin name, I believe."

"I forgot for a moment I was speaking to an English teacher that graduated *summa cum laude*, no less."

Angela laughed to ease the debate; they snuggled and turned their attention to the movie. Michael thought he could hear Tess barking. Tess was his first love. Michael wondered how she would accept Angela into her world.

"Honey, I'll be right back. That is Tess barking."

Angela responded, "I understand. Hurry back."

"It's okay, girl. I am next door. I have not forgotten you. But for now, I think you better stay here until I know how you will get along with Angela's cat." With that, Michael gave Tess a hug and led her upstairs to her bed.

Whoosh, bang! It seemed neighborhood kids were out shooting off fireworks. That might explain why Tess was barking. Michael knew right away who was behind it. Dan had a son who liked to hang out at his grandfather's house. It was thirteen-year-old Del. The name Del was short for Deliverance. He couldn't play a banjo. Nevertheless, he was full of piss and vinegar.

"Okay, Del, you're scaring the crap out of my dog. Can you call it a night?"

Del looked at Michael, "Yeah, since *you* are asking. I was just testing out some M80s."

"The neighbors behind us love to call the cops."

"What am I supposed to do on the weekend? I think I'll walk down to the woods behind Buckeye Elementary and camp out."

"Sounds like a plan to me, Del. Goodnight, and thanks for listening."

"No problem, Mr. Simon."

Del was just like his dad except he was polite. Michael and Dan had been very mischievous as teenagers.

Michael was curious about Dan, "What is your dad doing tonight?"

“I don’t know. He said something about a late-night bowl at the River Bowling Alley,” Del replied, as he high-tailed it out of talking distance.

Chapter 5

Michael thought back to a time when he and Dan had driven to Route 62 and purchased four grosses of cherry bombs and a box full of firecrackers and rockets of various sizes. He could not get mad at Del, an angel by comparison.

Mike sat down in his recliner for a moment and thought about fireworks and late-night shenanigans.

There was a road that ran perpendicular to Crane River. It ran into South Crane Road. The road was frequently referred to as the Spook Light Road. According to the legend, a motorcyclist had been racing down the road with girlfriend sitting behind him. They hit a patch of gravel, and the motorcycle veered off the road and into a bridge abutment, head on. It was a scene of tragedy where both people had lost their lives. The man was decapitated.

For the last twenty years, people would drive down to the intersection of County Road 6 and Spook Light Road late at night. They would turn their headlights off and on three times, then honk the horn three times, and then sit at the intersection and wait. As the legend went, if the signal worked, a headless ghost rider would come from out of nowhere on his motorcycle. He would get behind the vehicle and try to run the car off the road, near the bridge where he had been decapitated.

Dan, Michael and other friends helped rig Ed Thomas's car so he could turn one headlight off. Many Friday nights were spent sitting just off South Crane Road waiting for a victim. With walkie-talkies, Lou and Ed would call Dan and Mike to let them know when they had a victim. Ed would start up Spook Light Road with no lights. Then he would turn the one headlight on, when the other

car was just two hundred feet in front of him. Without exception, the victims would race away in a fit of terror. Ed would turn at County Road 6 and pull off the road until the other car was out of sight. Then he and Lou would go back to the spider trap and wait for the next victim. Of course, there was plenty of beer in the car. The alcohol made the waiting easier as everyone would be talking while they watched the roads. When the beer ran out, that often ended the night's activities.

Halloween in 1972 seemed like the perfect night to go to Spook Light Road. However, the guys had a harrowing experience in store for them. It would be a night none of them would ever forget.

The night had started out benign enough when trick-or-treating began at nightfall. Some residents asked the guys if they were too old for Halloween. Those houses usually got a toilet paper makeover or a good window soaping. Dan had a bag of laughs in his pocket that he would turn on when the people came to the door.

It was a year when Halloween masks were getting more professional looking. Mike had a hockey mask on. The movie *Friday the Thirteenth*, with Jason Voorhees, did not come out until 1980. However, where do you think the hockey mask idea came from? Dan wore a *Planet of the Apes* mask that made him look like Cornelius.

Lou, whose nickname was Snake, being true to his nature, had on a snake mask. Lou was a genius according to the tests he was given in high school. He was an avid reader. He knew the serpent god guarded the entrance to the underworld. Lou read books that described the myth of the serpent god. It only reinforced his interest in everything reptilian.

Lenny had a pig mask that he wore with a Cleveland Indians baseball cap, and Rob had on a clown mask.

It was kind of a scary group walking down the street to some of the other kids.

Mike would pull his mask off and reassure the little kids that it was all right.

The guys walked the residential streets of Harborview for about an hour. They had accumulated more than enough candy to carry them through the next couple of weeks.

Now, it was off to Cemetery Road. They had borrowed Eddy's car to sit in the usual spot on South Crane Road. After waiting and drinking from a case of Stroh's beer, they noticed a lone car had turned south on Spook Light Road. Stroh's beer was a favorite for the gang, but Rolling Rock was the second choice.

The car on Spook Light Road was a black 1970 Cadillac Coupe Deville. It pulled off the side of the road and someone got out. Mike and the others were in

a Pontiac Lemans with a 326ci engine block and an exhaust cutout that was capped just under the driver's side door. For extra effect, the cutout could be unscrewed to make the Pontiac sound like a tank with a ramjet.

Inside the Cadillac were four Toledo gang members, who were looking for a fight with anyone or anything they found. They had been smoking marijuana, popping black beauties, and drinking. They also had two handguns and a shotgun. Crime was showing its ugly head in Harborview. One person had gotten out to urinate, and then climbed back inside the Cadillac. One of the occupants in the Cadillac stuck the shotgun out the window and pulled the trigger.

All the guys looked at each other.

Then Lou, who was driving, said, "Time to kick some *real* ass!"

With all lights off, Lou put the Pontiac in gear and drove slowly toward the Cadillac. Two hundred feet behind it Lou turned off the car and put his leather gloves on. He rolled down the driver's window and climbed out. While looking around, he unscrewed the cap on the cutoff. Then he climbed back in and told everyone to put their seatbelts on. This particular night the guys had brought two large rockets and a gross of cherry booms.

Lou said to the other guys, "Any SOB that comes to Harborview with that kind of attitude needs to be degraded, humiliated, and made to feel like a complete *horse's ass*!"

Lou started the car. It made a rumbling sound like one might measure on the Richter scale. *Boom, Boom, Boom!* The sound of the exhaust was like thunder and could be heard a mile from the car. Slowly, the Pontiac pulled alongside the Cadillac. Someone in the Cadillac lit a lighter, and the driver's side window slowly went down. Lou turned the headlights on, revved the engine, and sat there. Then Lou turned the inside dome light on.

Peering at the hoods were four people in Halloween masks. Lou shoved the clutch down, popped it into first gear, and sped off heading toward Fremont. It did not take a rocket scientist to figure these hooligans were going to pursue. Lenny told everyone to light a cigarette and load up on cherry bombs.

The race was on. The Cadillac came so close at first it looked like it was going to ram into the Pontiac—but not for long. An ether injection kit had been installed in the Pontiac, and Lou pushed the dash-mounted button that initiated the ether injection. The Pontiac took off like a jet. All the windows were rolled down, and Operation Depth Charge commenced. Cherry bombs were flying out of all four windows. The Cadillac was being pummeled with explosions on the hood, the roof, the windshield, and under the chassis.

Enraged by all the damage being inflicted on the Cadillac, the *tough guys* attempted another charge. Up they came as the Pontiac was now topping out at over 120 m.p.h.

"Light the rocket!" Lou shouted as he held it out the driver's window. Swoosh! Wham! The rocket found its mark. It stuck in the front grill of the Cadillac.

The Cadillac slowed, as they thought an explosion was imminent. Then, the finale came. There was a big flash of red, white, and blue.

"God Bless America!" Now, that was a tribute to freedom of expression.

The cutout was put back in place to make the Pontiac less conspicuous. It was now 1:30 in the morning and no place to buy beer. Lou drove back to town, and the group pulled into the parking lot next to Mel's market.

"I know Marshall Kinney is stocking shelves tonight. I'm gonna knock on the back door to see if he'll open it," Rob said.

Rob had Lou drove around to the back of the grocery store. Police Chief Blayne would not see them sitting there. Not a minute passed, and Rob came trotting out with two cases of Rolling Rock. Rob was short and stocky but strong as a bull. He opened the trunk door and properly stashed the beer. Then the group headed toward the town cemetery on State Route 101. The living did not generally venture into this part of town after midnight. The work shed at the north side of the property afforded stealth. Even the police chief did not know how to get to this secluded spot.

The guys all got out of the car, parted with their masks, and stood in a straight line seeing who could shoot their stream the farthest. Lenny won that round. However, he could hold a six-pack before he had to relieve himself. There was a lot of pressure behind the hose. The Pontiac was still in excellent condition considering what might have happened to it earlier.

The night sky was full of stars, and the cemetery was outside of town making the night sky more magnificent to look at. Falling stars crisscrossed the sky, and the moon was nearly to the western horizon. Michael felt lucky that he had friends like these to share these adventures. He felt that growing up in Harborview was the best thing that ever happened to him.

A satellite began to travel slowly toward them, coming from the north and going south. They were pretty toasted so this event would never be validated. Lenny reached into the car for a flashlight. Under the front seat was a metal flashlight that ran off two C-sized batteries. He began to blink the flashlight at the object in the sky. It looked about the brightness of Venus. Suddenly, as it was just about directly overhead, it stopped moving. They all looked up in disbelief.

Lenny said to everyone, "Did that thing stop or is it just me?"

Rob responded in a comical tone causing everyone but Lenny to laugh: "It's just you."

Then the light in the sky got bigger and bigger as if the object were descending.

Everyone yelled, "Oh, Shit!" and ran into the building where the tractor was stored.

Michael grinned. "Man, that's cool. Let's go out and see if they want to party."

Slowly the four of them came back out of the repair shop and looked up where the object had been.

"Damn, we blew it," Lenny said, as he saw what appeared to be the object now off in the sky to the south of them. It was back up into its original orbit and no longer as big as a full moon.

"Does your dad keep any food out here, in his office?" Lou asked.

Dan responded, "Yeah, he has chips and sometimes keeps bread and baloney in the fridge."

They all wondered into the office area where they found a couch, clock, coffee maker, and refrigerator. It was set up for those days when Mr. Sexton and his wife were fighting; he could come out and spend the night reading magazines and watching television on the small black-and-white. Tacked to the back door of the attached garage were a skull and crossbones that glowed in the dark. However, it was late, and all the photo-luminescent pigments had lost their ability to glow.

"It's four in the morning. You guys want to call it a night?" Dan asked.

Michael commented, "Yeah, I wonder if I'm locked out again. My parents have started nailing the basement windows shut now."

Lenny made the offer: "Come over to my house."

"All of us?" Lou asked.

"Hell no! You others have a home even if it is a kennel," Lenny said with a shit-eating grin.

With that, they all jumped back into the Pontiac and headed back into town.

Knock, knock, knock!

"Michael?"

Michael thought he was still dreaming. Then he awoke. "Oh, shit, I fell asleep."

"Yeah, Angela, I'll be right there."

"It's been two hours since you went to see what your dog was barking about. I thought you were giving yourself a reason to leave."

"No, no honey. It was the neighbor kid. Then I sat in the recliner and...well," Michael was embarrassed.

"Its okay; the girls have been up twice since you left. They said they needed a drink. I think they were just playing," Angela explained.

Michael responded, "A kiss would give me a reason to return."

They embraced in each other's arms, kissed, and pulled each against the other. Angela was so sensual. Mike was very handsome to Angela. Together they returned to Angela's house.

"I think we can go to bed now," Angela proposed.

Michael had renewed his energy after the nap, and he could hardly wait to make love to Angela. They both threw their cloths off and covered with the quilt.

"Michael, you have a wonderful effect on me," Angela said, as she rolled her tongue around his.

Michael whispered as he rolled onto Angela, "If we keep this up we will have to build a covered walkway from your house to mine."

Angela was soft, and her body seemed to fit perfectly to Michael's. They wanted to make loud, passionate love. However, they suppressed that desire because of the children in the next room.

Angela spoke softly: "We have to be quiet about this, Michael."

Saturday morning soon turned to afternoon. Everyone walked to Tony's restaurant.

The girls, Heidi and Heather, were bouncing on the seat as they looked at everyone. They both had gum and were chewing loudly enough that Angela had to ask them to take the gum out of their mouths.

"Do you girls want a milkshake?"

They both replied at the same time: "Yes, yes, yes."

After everyone ate, they took a walk to Memorial Park located at the west end of South Street. Angela sat the girls in swings, and they pushed the girls, as the girls sang songs.

Michael commented to Angela, "I like this parenting thing."

It was a fun afternoon. Michael called the Craft house to see how Bobby was doing.

Linda answered the telephone: "Bobby is home. Can you bring the girls home now?"

Michael responded, "Sure thing; they ate lunch at Tony's restaurant. Then Angela and I took them to Memorial Park to swing. They might be ready for a nap."

Linda and Bobby lived near the Park on Finch Road on the east side of town.

With that, Michael loaded the girls' things into his car and drove them to the Craft house. The girls ran to the door as soon as Michael turned the engine off.

Linda met Michael at the door. "Bobby is in bed. He has a bad headache."

Michael waved as he walked toward the car. "I'll come by and see him in a few days. If you need anything, just call me. You have to meet Angela sometime. She is great with kids."

Linda waved to Michael as she replied, "I will. It'll give me a change to thank her, too. Thanks, Michael. Sorry to cut it so short."

"Bye girls!"

"You have a couple of angels there. Bye, Linda. Tell Bobby I'm thinking about him," With that, Michael drove back to town.

He went back to the house and picked up his dog, Tess. Then he loaded up his two fishing poles and tackle box.

Michael paused. "Darn! I forgot about mowing Angela's lawn."

"Tess, I'm going to have to chain you to the hook on the tree for a few minutes; then maybe we can go catch some Catfish."

Michael got the lawn mower out and headed to Angela's front yard. The grass was overgrown. It was a good thing he had a mulch bag attached.

Vroom, vroom.

Michael thought, "Darn, that's loud! Oh well, this will only take five minutes."

Angela opened the front door and smiled.

"Angela, this won't take long. Then I'm going to see if I can catch some fish for supper."

Angela looked at Michael and said, "Didn't you tell me you were going to teach me how to fish?"

Michael didn't remember it that way. Angela was fun to be around, and she had a way of making Mike feel good about himself. However, he was hoping to get Lenny and Doug to go with him.

He thought about Angela's comment and decided, "Oh, well. What would be the harm in it?"

"Yeah, I sure did. Do you have some old bibs and a pair of boots to wear?"

"I have some hiking boots, blue jeans, and an old jacket. Will that do?"

"Okay, let me finish up here while you get ready; then we'll hit the highway."

Michael thought to himself, "How often do you get a neighbor who is your friend, lover, and likes to fish? It just doesn't happen."

Michael got the grass cut and was loading the back of his SUV with fishing gear. Tess was in the back seat as Mike drove his car over to Angela's driveway

and escorted Angela to his Ford Explorer. The Explorer had a tan leather interior and bucket seats with separate temperature controls for front and back seats. It was a kind of limited edition model. An armrest separated the driver from the passenger, but, it offered a large compartment for storing everything from glasses, flashlights, cologne, tissues, and even fishing lures.

“Do you put your own bait on the hook?” Mike asked.

Angela laughed. “You would be surprised what I can do, especially when I am trying to impress someone.”

Swan Creek was close to town but was used mostly to catch Bullhead. Bullhead was a smaller version of Catfish and very common to Harborview. Michael wanted to catch Walleye. Walleye was the filet mignon of fish.

Michael had his boat moored at the Bonjour inlet, which was located in a part of the conservation club called the La Toussaint. A private hunting club owned the land and the Bonjour boat docking facilities.

Michael parked his car next to the dock, walked over, and started to remove the canvas cover on his modified tri-hull boat. It had a full-width windshield and a roof that was retractable. It was 16.6 feet in length and had a cross beam of 6.5 feet. Onboard was a single outboard seventy-five-horsepower Evinrude motor with an electric starter. It had a depth finder as well as a Midland Marine radio with twenty-five watts of transmitter power, weather channels, and a DSC emergency channel. A waterproof red strobe distress light also sent off a VHS emergency band signal. There were fresh bottled water, life vests—including a floatation vest for Tess—and a two-man inflatable raft in case the boat capsized. Michael tried to leave as little to chance as possible.

Michael helped Angela aboard, “Are you ready to get wet?”

Angela kissed Michael and sat in the passenger seat. “This boat is just perfect.”

Michael handed Angela a sailor hat and replied, “I learned in the Navy that you can’t be too safe, especially when it comes to taking on the weather. Several men got swept overboard while I was at sea on the aircraft carrier.”

Michael opened his tackle box and showed Angela what he had inside. “I have plenty of synthetic worms and other fake tackle already in my tackle box. I just bought two dozen minnows and a box of night crawlers. That is mainly what I fish with when I go out to the reefs just off Marblehead Island. We can use a spoon with the hook and put a sliding noose around the bait, so it will not slip off.”

Michael got out a Lake Erie central basin map and showed Angela where they were going to try to fish. “This is where we are, and this is where we want to go.”

Michael pointed to the small dots in the distance and said, "Kelly's Island, Rattlesnake Island, Green Island, and the Reef Complex all have good fishing."

Michael liked using minnows with perch spreaders when he fished near bottom. He fished mostly in twenty-five to thirty-five feet of water. However, he usually stayed right on the reef's edge where the big drop-off was located.

After cutting through the water going due north, Michael was close to North Bass Island when he slowed and stopped the boat. "Do you see that curve on the depth finder? It shows where the reefs drop off into deep water. Those little dots are groups of fish."

Angela found the whole experience slightly intimidating. However, she adapted very quickly. "I didn't realize there was so much involved in fishing in Lake Erie."

Michael felt confident in what he was doing. "I am your guide. Leave the details to me. You just enjoy the surroundings. I'll prepare your bait and hooks. You can lower the fishing line, and then we'll wait to see if something bites."

Angela smiled. "This really is wonderful out here. It gives a great sense of freedom."

"It does. I'm pleased that I brought you out here. There is no alcohol, and you don't need to worry about my having a problem navigating back to port." Michael kissed Angela.

Angela seemed like the best candidate for the closed-face spinning reel, which was operated by a push button. Michael had two open-faced reels that he preferred to use.

Michael set up Angela's pole and put worms on both hooks. "Drop the line until it stops; then reel it back up about three feet and we'll watch for a bite."

Angela set her pole into a holder on the side of the boat and took a drink of her bottled water. "You make this seem so easy Michael."

Michael put his arm around Angela, "If a Walleye bites, you will see your pole go down slowly. That is when you pull your pole back to set the hook in its mouth. You'll catch on."

"The breeze is so nice I could take a nap," Angela replied.

Tess stood in the boat and panted as the boat sat in place and drifted slowly in a southwest direction. She enjoyed the fresh air as much as Michael did. Michael knew he would never give Tess away. She was the mildest-tempered dog he had ever seen.

Angela nudged Mike. "Is the fishing pole supposed to do that?"

"Quick, pull the line back and start reeling it in!" Mike exclaimed.

Michael was up next to her, “You got a fish and from the way it’s pulling, you might have a big one.”

“There it is, baby. Let me get the net under it. Hold it steady if you can. I got it! Wow! It’s a monster. That is a Walleye, baby. It’s heavy and big. You caught us a trophy fish. This scale says eighteen and a half pounds, and it’s just shy of twenty inches long.”

Angela was so excited she was jumping up and down and wasn’t sure if she should laugh or cry. “Michael, I love fishing with you.”

Tess went over to the fish and sniffed it. Then Michael put it into the ice hold to keep it fresh.

Angela held her hands to her mouth as she continued to jump up and down in the boat.

“It’s okay, honey. We have it. It won’t get away. When we get back home and fix this, you’ll swear it’s like lobster—only better.”

Michael and Angela continued to fish for another three hours and caught several Perch and another Walleye.

The breeze was cool and whipped through the boat in occasional gusts. Michael noticed the change. “We need to go in. The wind is coming from the southwest now, and the waves will get choppy as we go toward the jetty.”

Michael packed up his gear, started the engine, and headed back to the Bonjour causeway and the land bridge that identified their pathway back to the docks. A lighthouse stood at the entrance. Its light directed them right to the entrance to the jetty.

Over four hours had passed since they left the dock. Even though Angela had a sweater and coat on, she was getting a chill. The boat had a tri-hull design that helped get them back to shore quickly. However, it still took about thirty minutes.

Michael loaded the fish from the boat to the back of his truck. He said, “Get into the truck and I’ll turn the engine on so the heater will warm up. We have nearly thirty pounds of Walleye, Perch, and largemouth Bass that need to be cleaned and filleted. I know a fish market not far from here. We’ll get that done right away, then head for home. You have been a brave little warrior, Angela.”

When fishing in Lake Erie, a local fish that was often caught and released was the freshwater drum. It was treated with disdain by the local anglers who referred to it as a Sheephead. For some reason, locals did not like this fish. Michael knew plenty of people who liked the meat because it had very little oil in it. Just not in Harborview. Sheephead put up a good fight when you caught one. The otolith, which came from the freshwater drum’s inner ear, could be found along the

beach. The Native Americans had used the otolith to make necklaces and other protective amulets.

After securing the boat and driving back onto the main highway, Michael headed toward Betz's Bait Shop on Route 62. He turned to Angela and said, "Betz's Bait Shop will get our fish cleaned and wrapped quick as a wink. I know you feel burned from the wind because I feel it, too. However, I want to make fish tonight, and you don't have to do anything but enjoy the meal. Is it a deal?"

"Of course, sweetheart," She replied.

The bait shop was just turning its lights on as night began to fall. Gilbert Betz had a machine that took scales off the fish, each in less than five seconds.

"Gil, you do such a good job when you fillet my fish. Please wrap the Walleye in five-pound portions."

Gilbert asked Michael, "Did you hear Dave Trip is having trouble walking and may have to use a wheelchair?"

"No way! He was one of the healthiest guys I know."

Gilbert talked as he wrapped. "Yeah, I heard he might have some kind of neurological condition like Multiple Sclerosis."

Michael asked in curiosity, "I wonder if walking through the swampy parts of Crane River all those years, when he was trapping muskrat, had an ill effect on him? Kathy Williams was diagnosed with MS when she was just nineteen years old. She lives in Denver, Colorado, now. She lived next to the river, and the family got water that was from a fifty-foot well. Do you think BerAl Chemical has had any health effects on the people downstream from the plant?"

Gilbert looked at Michael. "Hell, yes! You know only that stringy moss would grow in the river near the plant. That plant has been the single biggest source of hazardous waste seeping into Crane River, and they have been doing it for almost forty years. There is a lot more cancer and lung disease in Harborview than McKinley. The plant's leech bed is too close to the bank of the river. I don't think they completed the containment reservoir according to government standards. Besides, they are exempt from liability because the plant is considered part of the government weapons projects program."

Michael introduced Angela. "Gil, this is my friend. She will be teaching English at the high school this fall. She isn't saying much right now because she's a little feverish from the wind blowing off the lake."

Then he turned to Angela and told her about Gilbert. "He knows a lot about Lake Erie. His dad was a captain on a Great Lakes freighter. Do you remember Gordon Lightfoot's song *The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald*? That wreck

happened in 1975. Gilbert knew one of the men who drowned when the freighter sank in Lake Superior.”

“Thanks, Gil. I have to get home.”

Michael got Angela back into the warm truck and talked more about fishing as she closed her eyes and tried to relax. “That lighthouse at the entrance to the jetty, we came in and out of, contains a Fresnel lens. Mr. Fresnel designed lighthouse lenses in the early 1800s. We were lucky enough to have one of his famous lenses sitting atop our lighthouse. It really puts out the light. More than once, I almost went the wrong direction, but that lighthouse directed me in. Gilbert knew about one occasion because I came there after fishing one evening. It was raining, and an ice storm had come in from the northeast. I had to stay at the fish market that night because the road conditions were too dangerous to drive back to Harborview. I was lucky his store was close and that the tavern was only fifty feet away. So, I could drink and didn’t have to drive that night.”

Michael held Angela for a moment and said, “You go home and take a bath. Put some oatmeal in the water, and it will take some of the stinging out of your windburn.”

Angela still had her hands in the coat pockets, “I have Marigold lotion at home. It works on sunburn. I think I will try it. I will call you Michael, when I am dressed.”

Michael walked her toward her house, “Are we on tonight for fish?”

Angela looked back over her shoulder. “We sure are.”

“Would you like some company, like another couple?” Michael asked.

“Sure. If I fall asleep, come over and get me before the company arrives. Who are you inviting?”

“I wanted to ask Lenny and his wife Linda to bring the kids over to the house. I know Linda needs to get out. She tends to stay at home too much because of her allergies,” Michael replied.

Michael called and Linda answered the telephone. She said Lenny was around somewhere, but she was not sure where. Mike asked her to have Lenny call him back because it was important. There seemed no reason to tell Linda what he wanted to do unless he could get Lenny to commit. Michael took a few minutes to brush Tess since she had gotten into some wild mustard, thistle, and had a few other burrs in her coat. Tess let Michael brush her coat until all the burrs had been removed. She kept her composure the whole time.

Michael picked up the telephone, “Hello, Lenny? Hey, can I get you, Linda, and the kids to come over for an hour or two for a fish fry? Angela and I went out on the boat, and we caught Walleye and a bunch of Perch and Bass. You and I

have not had the chance for some fishing in quite a while. I really want you and the family to come over. You know I have plenty of beer, and the kids have a big yard to run around. Ask Linda, please.”

Lenny responded, “Linda said okay. She is feeling pretty good today. Her doctor changed some of the medication she takes, and it seems to be working. Are you going to have Angela over too?”

“Yeah, I thought we could play a few hands of Pinochle after dinner.”

Lenny laughed. “Okay, bud, we’ll team up against the ladies. Just remember the signals.”

Chapter 6

Lenny, Linda, his son, Tommy, and daughter, Lynn, arrived at 9 PM. It was perfect timing for Michael because everything was prepared. Angela had just blended some Margaritas for her and Linda. The kids jumped out of the car and started petting Tess.

Michael introduced Angela. "Linda, this is my friend, Angela."

"They have the best-behaved kids in town. It must not be hereditary, at least from Lenny's side. Come in; dinner is ready," Michael expressed.

The dinner table was set in the kitchen, and a leaf was added so six people could sit around it comfortably.

Lenny spoke up and asked, "Where did you catch this fish? It tastes too good to be from around here."

"We went out about a half mile from North Bass Island. It is close to where you and I have fished before. Angela caught the first fish, and it was almost twenty inches long. It nearly broke the line. I was using spreaders like we do sometimes for Perch, and it worked on the Walleye," Michael replied.

Dinner was finished and the children were tired. Sleeping bags were placed on the family room floor for them to sleep on. Tommy wanted to play Nintendo, but he could hardly keep his eyes open.

After Michael cleaned the kitchen, he turned to Angela and Linda and said, "Lenny and I are going to go out and take a walk toward downtown. We will be back in a few minutes. Please don't be telling Angela any horror stories about me, Linda."

Angela looked at Linda. "You tell me anything you like. You're the first person in town that could tell me anything about Michael."

Linda took a drink of her soda then replied, "I met Michael when Marshall Kinney and I were neighbors. I did not know much about him. It seemed like he got along with everyone. Marshall and I were making out one time with the front drapes of my house open, and cars were going by. I think Michael told Marshall we might want to be more discreet next time our parents were gone. I was about fifteen at the time."

"I met Lenny through Marshall, and we got married after dating two years. Now, we have two kids, and I want them to get just a little older so I can get my certificate as a beautician. I want to set up my own beauty shop. I know Lenny and Michael have been close friends since around seventh grade. They were both part of big group of guys. The gang didn't go out and start fights. Nevertheless, about a dozen people hung around, raced cars, drank, cussed, and smoked. I think Lou Appleton, the one they nicknamed Snake, turned to using a lot of drugs and had gotten into some trouble with the law. Michael went into the Navy and then moved back to Harborview. He was dating someone just before you moved in. I think she knows Michael is interested in you now."

"What about you, Angela? I heard you grew up here and went off to college."

Angela sat back and leaned her arm over the chair. "I left for college in 1978 and went to Massachusetts State University in Princeton. There were a lot of parties and fraternity activities. I majored in Literature and Psychology. Princeton, I found out, has a connection to Salem. A woman who was part of an organization approached me. She claimed a group she was a member of was involved in manipulating world events. Sounds kinda freaky, huh?"

Linda sat up and leaned forward to hear more.

Angela told Linda a story that was remarkable. "Do you remember the stories of the Salem witch trials of the 1692? Many said they were because of hysteria. Some historians claim that part of the irrational behavior by Salem residents was caused by ergot yeast that was present in the rye grain used in their bread. It appears ergot causes hallucinations. There were about six hundred citizens in the community at the time. Half the population of Salem wanted to leave, and the other half wanted to stay. The community was primarily farmers. However, they had come on hard times. There were religious, political, and economic differences that were putting a strain on Salem. The main factors that started and fueled the trials were politics, religion, family feuds, economics, and the imaginations and fears of the people."

She paused, took a drink of her ice tea, and continued. "Reading was a popular pastime when people had idle time. This allowed them to delve into books of superstition. Fortune telling and prophecy were subjects that some of the younger people took an interest in. In fact, as the story goes, a few girls in Essex County started to dabble in the practice of calling on divinations while forming circles. Some of the young people began to believe they had tapped into an energy that gave them powers to control future events. As a matter of history, there was nothing to substantiate those claims. The social structure was fractured in Salem, and the practice of calling up demons, witches, and mystical animals only fueled the community's fear that something supernatural was causing all the problems."

Linda was beginning to feel uncomfortable since she was superstitious.

"Do you want me to go on?" Angela asked.

Linda nodded her head. "Yes, this is very interesting."

Angela conveyed more details. "The main religious group in Salem at the time was the Puritans. They believed in witchcraft and devil conjuring. Anyone who might carry out witchcraft was considered a sinner because it would be defying God's superiority. Further, the Puritans feared these people might be capable of calling up demons to commit cruel acts against others. Sarah Osborne, Sara Good and someone named Tituba were accused of witchcraft due more to their lower social standing than because of any association to mischief. Indian attacks, Smallpox and other natural disasters did not help the situation any."

Angela got up and walked to the back of her chair as she continued with her story. "The community had become vexed by its own fears and prejudices. Dozens were accused of witchcraft, including a minister. It was said he was the leader of a Salem coven. Within a very short time, over two hundred people were being held for practicing witchcraft. Then Salem began to hang people."

Angela could tell Linda was uncomfortable. However, she had to tell the whole story for it to make sense. "Bridget Bishop was the first of several people to be dangled at the end of a rope on Gallows Hill. All told, over nineteen people met their deaths at the hands of the courts. Governor Phips ended the Salem witch trials in May 1693. As the story goes, no one has died as a convicted witch in America since the Salem witch trials."

Angela turned, with her hands crossed behind her back, and looked out the kitchen window. "Something about that story never made it into the history books. Extraterrestrials were said to have had an underwater base near the town of Salem. In 1639, a UFO was said to have risen from Muddy River. It took three men into the craft and examined them. One settler, by the name of James Everell,

was said to have been one of the abductees. I looked through the public library for sources for this information, but there was nothing there.”

“The woman who approached me said she was a descendant of a race of people who had been inbred with the extraterrestrials. She seemed to know everything about me. For weeks, I had recurring dreams of being in a mist-filled room with small children walking around. They looked human but very thin and had larger than normal heads. One approached me and said I was her mother. She did not speak but told me telepathically. She said she would see me again and that I was very special. The *Federation* planned to help me change humankind.” Angela paused.

Linda took out her inhaler and used it, “I don’t know if I believe in that supernatural stuff, Angela.”

Angela sat back down and clearly recalled, “I did not join the group. Nevertheless, I saw the woman once again on a walking trail in Princeton. She spoke to me in a telepathic way. She said that many Earth changes were coming. The human race was being genetically altered so we would survive the global changes. She also said that we had thousands of underground cities already in place in preparation for the first change that would occur because of the explosion of a great caldera. The woman said that the land would rise more than ten feet in one year around Old Faithful at Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming. There would be a great aerial display of UFOs around the world to signal the time to prepare to move to the underground facilities. There are three such facilities right here, near town. The woman also told me that the United States government, along with many key figures in some other countries, was already aware of these future events. However, no one is telling the general public, to help prevent a worldwide panic.”

Linda’s eyes were wide open.

Angela asked Linda if she should stop. But Linda wanted to hear all of what she had to say. “When the great caldera explosion occurs, a global ice age will occur, and Earth’s magnetic poles will reverse. Rivers will flow in the opposite direction. Water will cover nearly all the major coastal cities. I was told not to tell anyone this information, so you must promise me you won’t say a word! If you keep your word, I will help you and your family find shelter when Earth changes. President Eisenhower warned us in 1961 to begin preparing.”

Angela looked into Linda’s eyes. “Do you remember Nikola Tesla, the scientist who pioneered AC motors, high-frequency lighting, radio, remote-control devices, and electromagnetic principles of propulsion? He was a hybrid human.”

She seemed to have an honest knowledge of things as she spoke. “Nikola Tesla spoke of a death ray he invented. It was true. He had the plans, and the United States government stole it right after his death. The U.S. military has already built the device. They have been using this so-called Black Project sparingly in foreign battlefields.

“Promise me you won’t tell a soul, Linda. Not even Michael knows.” Angela looked at Linda with a coherent stare.

“I can’t believe what you just told me. I will not tell anyone because no one would believe me. They would just lock me up in the loony bin,” Linda replied, as her lower lip shook. She sipped her soda, as her mouth had become dry.

Angela realized she had told the wrong person. She could see Linda was visibly shaken and getting sicker. “Don’t worry, Linda. There will be plenty of time, if this happens, to get everyone we love into shelters. Camp Perry has several openings into the salt mines through their so-called munitions bunkers.”

Meanwhile, as they enjoyed their walk together, Lenny asked Michael how serious he was about Angela. “Are you two getting to know each other?”

“Yeah, but I’m not really sure about my feelings toward her yet.”

Linda’s face was beet red as Michael and Lenny walked back into the house, “Lenny, we need to get home. My medications don’t seem to be working very well tonight.”

Lenny could tell Linda was not joking. He woke the children and told Michael he would see him in a few days.

Michael, who at first was smiling, now had a look of concern on his face.

“Linda, are you sure you don’t just want to lie down? I have a spare oxygen tank here for emergencies.”

Michael had a concern that Linda might end up in the ER. “Lenny, please take the tank with you. You can return it when we get together again.”

Angela seemed unusually calm under the circumstances. Michael wondered what the young women’s conversation had been. However, he knew Linda could just get to feeling bad if she got too tired.

Michael carried one of the children to the car. “Linda, you or Lenny call me tomorrow so I know you’re okay.”

Lenny spoke out his car window as he backed down the driveway. “I’ll call you tomorrow, Mike.”

Lenny slowed the car and said, “It’s probably a good time to get home anyway. Thanks a lot for the fish. It tasted better than lobster. It’s the best-tasting fish in the Great Lakes!”

Michael looked at Angela. “I don’t have a very good feeling about this.”

Sure enough, Mike got the call from Lenny at three in the morning. Linda had only gotten worse. Lenny had taken her to Bass City Medical Center, a hundred-bed hospital. The medical center provided service to Oak, Sandusky, Huron, and Lorain Counties.

Michael jumped up out of bed, "Don't worry, Lenny, I'm getting my pants on now. I will be there in fifteen minutes."

"You stay here, Angela. Lenny wants me to come to the hospital. It seems Linda is not any better. I will call you as soon as I get a chance to figure out what is going on. Keep my spot warm for me." Michael kissed her.

State Route 151 ran straight from Harborview to Bass City. Michael drove his Ford F250 XLT diesel with 4WD, which certainly could kick ass and handled the road around most of the curves just outside of town. He made it to the hospital in twelve minutes, pulled up in back, and walked in through the emergency room doors. The standard entrance was locked after 10 PM. He saw Lenny pacing back and forth in the waiting area.

Michael went up to Lenny. "It'll be okay. What has the doctor told you?"

Lenny was almost in tears. "She is real sick. They are talking about putting a tube down her throat to help her breath. I do not know what I would do if something happened to her. My mom is watching the kids. She drove over, met me here, and took the kids home with her. Mike, I don't handle shit like this very well."

Mike sat down next to Lenny in the waiting room. "Try to calm down. What medications was she taking? Has anyone in Respiratory Therapy given her any nebulizer treatments?"

Lenny was rubbing his hands as he worried. "No. That doctor is acting like it's no big deal. He has her on a venti-mask, and they ordered some blood work. I don't know, Mike. I do not trust that idiot. He is a rent-a-doctor from Toledo."

"Are you the respiratory therapist?" Mike inquired of the whitecoat who was passing by.

"Yes, I'm Chad, why?" the technician responded.

"This is Linda Rivers's husband, Lenny. He needs to tell you some things that might help in treating Linda. This doctor is doing a lousy job of communicating. Can you talk to him?"

"Sure. What's going on?" Chad asked.

Lenny explained the situation the best he could. "She had been taking all the medications just like the doctor told her to. If she gets upset about something, it seems like her symptoms can get worse. Linda got upset about something tonight but would not tell me what it was. I think that was the trigger. She does not have

anything for her nerves. Can you ask the doctor to give her something to calm her down before he decides to start sticking tubes down her throat?"

Chad did a good job of alleviating Lenny's fears. "I understand totally. I want to get her feeling better. If we are lucky and get a handle on this, she will be able to go home in a few hours. I gave her a nebulizer treatment with a mucolytic and a bronchodilator in it. She coughed some stuff up. White, frothy sputum with some thick mucus, something you would expect to see with an asthmatic. I will go back in there and ask the doctor for a sedative. Sometimes, with this doctor, you have to do the ordering for him. Don't say I said that, because I'll deny it."

About thirty minutes passed, and Lenny and Michael had gone through three cups of coffee each. The nurse in the emergency room came out and told Lenny she thought his wife was feeling well enough to take home. The nurse said she had some papers for him to sign first. Lenny jumped to his feet and followed the nurse to the discharge window.

Michael thought to himself of all the things that could have happened if Linda had not pulled through. It must have been scary for Linda, Lenny, and the kids.

Lenny turned to Michael. "They are bringing her out in a wheelchair; take my keys and drive my car up to the sally port entrance."

Even though his mother was a nurse at the hospital, Lenny didn't like being there. He was glad to take Linda home. "Michael, she looks a hundred times better than when we got here. They told me to take her to the doctor on Monday. I can't thank you enough. I think that someone in Respiratory Therapy made them give her something that helped pull her out of it."

Michael drove out of the parking lot after he watched Lenny and Linda drive away. He'd had more than his share of excitement in the last week, not a minute to himself since Angela arrived.

Chapter 7

As Michael drove back to Harborview, he could smell the scent of fish coming off the lake. He remembered it was just ten years earlier that signs had been posted to restrict swimming. Lake Erie had become too polluted. The Cuyahoga River had actually caught fire because it had so many petroleum byproducts dumped into it. After several lawsuits, the Environmental Protection Agency was forced to take action against dozens of companies that were dumping into the waterways. Unfortunately, all the pollution flowed into Lake Erie.

Now, the lake was finally looking clean. All the dead fish that commonly floated up onto the sandbar at the edge of the lake were gone. God only knows how much mercury, dioxins, pesticides, and other illness-causing substances were in the lake water and local soil. No wonder Linda teetered on the edge of constant illness.

Traveling home, Michael decided to take Route 62, which would take him past Camp Perry and the Davis Besse power plant. He had not given much thought to why the power plant had been built so far away from a metropolitan area. Could he be that dumb? All those years in the navy should have taught him something.

In case of a disaster, the government would want a nuclear power plant as far from a large city as possible. Interestingly, the Davis Besse plant was placed between Toledo and the Cleveland area. That put it just outside the small town of Harborview. No longer could he see his hometown as unspoiled territory. There went that theory of clean living, fresh air, and the open ranges of Harborview making for a healthy citizen.

Michael turned left on Route 15 and came back into town. It was almost eight o'clock Sunday morning, and Michael wanted to sleep all day. He stopped off at Ken's Grocery and Bait at the north end of Halley Street.

Michael walked through the front door. "Got some new spoons for lake fishing, I noticed."

Merrill West owned the carryout. "We have just about every color in the rainbow and then some."

"Has your wife made any sandwiches or cookies? I don't see anything in the display case but chips, pretzels, and Slim Jims."

"No, they pretty much cleaned me out of everything Saturday night, and she's sleeping," Merrill replied.

"Give me a Coca-Cola and two bags of pretzels."

Mike headed back into town and turned on Birch Street. He pulled up less than half a block away from St. Anthony's church and turned the SUV off. He kicked his feet up onto the dashboard. He was curious who was going to early church services. Jane Schwake was arriving early. They had dated a couple of times. She was his age and divorced with two kids from another man. Michael didn't want to admit the fact that she was hot, because she was the first one to get big boobs when she was a teenager. She grew up outside of town and her father was an insurance salesman in town. That made him some kind of big cheese. Mike had sinful thoughts about Jane. She tried to act stuck-up in school, but Mike knew it was all a facade. She got pregnant at the end of her senior year by some jerk three years her senior. Mike had dated Jane for a time and considered a serious relationship, but it never panned out. Nevertheless, he still carried a flame for her.

Oh, my God, there was Vicki Pickford. It must have been time for the church bell to ring. Michael rolled his window down.

He yelled out his window. "Vicki, forget it! I'll save you from that devil."

Vicki's face turned beet red as she ran up the steps to the front doors of St. Anthony's. She gave Michael a glancing grin.

Michael figured it would take her a while to forgive him for that stunt, but it was worth it. He had an undying lust for her going back to second grade.

Vicki left Harborview shortly after graduating from the same class as Michael. Michael had written to Vicki when he was in the Navy but figured she had not received any of the letters.

Her mother still lived in the house where Vicki grew up. The city had made a parking lot out of the land surrounding the house. It was the weirdest thing. In

the middle of a parking lot nearly as big as three tennis courts sat the Pickford house.

Michael was not going to church. Catechism and memories of the penguins' unceasing desire to smack him with anything they could get their hands on had clinched that. He figured *The Blues Brothers*' characters, Elwood and Jake Blues, had been a composite of his life. The scene where Jake and Elwood went to see the penguin, the Nun, reminded Mike he had not been alone when it came to religious persecution. In 1982, John Belushi died from a drug overdose, and Mike lost a hero.

Ah hah, there is Paul Lucas. He would be late for his own funeral. Well, it was time to head back home. Mike hoped Angela had left so he could relax.

Michael pulled into the driveway and saw Tess had been chained to the clothesline. This was not something Mike ever did, and it perturbed him.

"Tess, they say angels can come to a person in animal form. I know you're one of my guardian angels. Did Angela do this to you?"

He hugged her, after removing the cord attached to the clothesline. Michael walked with Tess to the bank of the river. He threw some stones and watched them skip. Jeff Hackle, a friend three years older than Mike, came to the river and lit a cigarette.

Jeff looked at Michael and spoke. "Last I remember, you were at one of my parties. You were about fourteen. Your brother brought you along. You got sick from drinking the Bacardi 151. I didn't think you'd ever get up after you fell in the yard. I think half the high school was in the house at one time or another that night. Where have you been all these years?"

Michael kicked the gravel. "I joined the Navy after school and stayed in for eight years. I've worked at BerAl for about three years now. I remember the party, all right, Jeff. It was raining...I went outside to puke my guts out and couldn't get back up off the lawn. After I'd been lying there for an hour, someone came out and got me up. I had one of the worst headaches of my life. I was so hot for Karen, and she was there, looking good. Someone told me she got married, had a couple of kids, divorced, and lived in DC. They also said she tried to take a nose-dive from six floors up. That whole family broke apart. Her two sisters married and now live—I don't know where—and the boy went into the Peace Corps. Sorry to hear your mother died. Heard yah took over the appliance business from your dad."

"I did it for a few years. Then I realized how much I hated this town. I moved out to the West Coast and took some classes in drama and acting. I was in some shows on stage, but it hasn't gone anywhere yet. They voted me "most talented"

of my senior class at Harborview High. Not sure yet where I'm most talented. I've saved up some money. I came back to see if anyone was still here. I walked by your place two days ago, and it looked like someone had moved in next door."

"A teacher moved in there. We've been out together a few times. I'm already attached to her. Are you married, Jeff?"

Jeff lit another cigarette. "I lived with a woman in San Jose for a year. I caught her fooling around. She had a valley girl mentality, so I kicked her out. The sex was good, but I couldn't bring myself to trust her again. No luck, out in California. I dated a woman with kids from three different men and got tired of that. If a social service worker wasn't knockin' at the door, one of her old boyfriends was calling to see if he could come over to crash. Then there was this woman who left her 'ol man' cause they had a child together. She told me he was giving more attention to his daughter than to her. It shoulda been a warning sign. I liked her kid, too. She was a cute kid. Jacqueline didn't want her kid to get any attention, I guess. Next thing I know, she wasn't comin' around anymore. I think some men become homosexual in that state 'cause the women are screwy in the head."

Michael remembered Jeff had a real drinking problem and figured he left Harborview to stop the drinking. "You've traveled some beaten highways, from the sound of it. There's lots of women in the country. I think you've just had a streak of bad luck."

Michael asked, "Do you remember Bob Orwen? His father farmed and was a preacher at a small church just outside of town. He moved away just after school. I never heard what happened to him. We used to drive around in Greytown, Genoa, and Elmore looking for girls."

"No, don't remember him."

"There was a death at the Keller factory in '80. Someone said Ron Deutsche walked over near the railroad tracks during lunch break, and a freight train hit him. I think some guys at the plant liked to tease him. He didn't fight back. Anyway, I wasn't back from the Navy in time to attend the funeral. The whole thing made me angry."

Linker finally left Harborview High School. All those years coaching, and he never got fired for manhandling students. It doesn't make sense," Michael seethed.

Jeff looked across to the other side of the river. "It's good to see yah again, Mike. You're not a kid anymore. I'll be goin' to Maine after I'm done visiting my dad. Then I have a job waiting in Bakersfield if I wanna go back to the Golden

State. It is really taking off there. Computers are the future. I have had some schooling in static and dynamic language.”

“What’s static and dynamic language? Ah, don’t matter. Take care, Jeff.”

Chapter 8

Michael decided to go to the Chance Lounge on South Renton Street and have a beer and a burger.

“Hey Jenny Hayden!”

“Michael, haven’t seen you in ages. Want a menu? Can I get you coffee now?” Jenny replied.

“No need for a menu. I’ll have a Rolling Rock, burger, and fries. You’re looking good, Jenny. Don’t you work in that club in Toledo?”

Jenny brought Michael the beer and poured it in the glass. “Yeah, I worked last night. I made a hundred dollars in tips. Your burger and fries will be out in a minute.”

This was another woman Michael never got the opportunity to date. “I always thought you would be a movie star. You seemed like a free spirit headed for great things when we were in school together. Weren’t you and Eddy going out?”

Jenny stood at the table. “No, he’s too mean for my taste. He was married to a Rosemary. Her family was from Marblehead. They had three kids together, and Ed was getting drunk every night. She was left to raise the kids herself. He didn’t leave her any transportation. She was depressed for years and overdosed on medication right in front of the kids. Lockwood Funeral sent an ambulance to their place and transported her to Bay City Medical Center. They had to call Ed at a bar, in Bay City, to come to the hospital. He went into the emergency room and told her to wake up. They had to show him she was really dead.”

"Damn, I knew her. She was real cute. I didn't know they'd gotten married. What a waste! Ed was in trouble a lot. It's too bad he didn't grow up. How old were the kids?"

"They were all little. I think the oldest one was six. I heard he married someone else within six months of her death."

"I need another beer after that story. Are you married, Jenny? I see a ring on your finger," Michael asked.

Jenny responded, "I was engaged until I found out he was already married. I just keep the ring on that finger to weed out people who try to come on to me. Since I've become an exotic dancer, it takes a long time before I trust someone. How come you haven't gotten married?"

"I was dating Julie, and she was messin' with one of my friends. I guess she thought I wouldn't find out."

"You could ask me out, Michael," Jenny responded. "I know you had a crush on me when I lived on Walnut Street next to the school. I remember you tryin' to look for me through the front window at night."

Michael was slightly embarrassed. "How did you know? I tried to act as if I was just walking by. Yeah, you were a woman back then. How could I not notice how cute you were? Is your family still around here?"

"My parents moved to Little Rock, Arkansas. My sister is married and lives in Flint, Michigan. Cindy has two daughters. They're so cute."

Michael tipped his beer, "If they look like you, they would be real knockouts. You were one of the sweetest girls in my class. I might take you up on that offer, Jen. Yah know, we had a nickname for you. We used to call you Star. We all thought you were going to be a movie star. I still think you'll be a star someday."

"I get off here at three and don't have plans, Michael."

Michael had to make a choice. Should he call Angela and make up a story? Why was he letting himself feel guilty about going out with Jenny? He always wanted to go parking with her. Jenny was built like a Hollywood model and even smelled like sex.

"Do you want me to pick you up here?"

"I'll do one better. Come over to my place. I live on Route 151, just two miles west of town. I'll give yah directions. If you get lost, my telephone number is 959-4554."

"It's been interesting. See yah at seven?"

Jenny wiped the table. "Yes, and please don't be late. We have a lot of things to talk about."

Michael left the money on the table and walked to his SUV. Jenny Hayden came running out, put her arms around him, and kissed him with her lips tight against his.

She straightened her skirt, brushed her hair back, and remarked, "There's a lot more of that waiting for you tonight."

"Feast or famine," he thought. He was going to enjoy himself while the feast lasted.

Michael arrived home at 5 PM. Tess had to be walked. As he opened his back door, Angela came up and kissed him.

"I decided to walk Tess, clean your house, and make you supper, Michael. I hope you don't mind. Lenny called and said Linda is doing fine. I put some of my roses in your vase. They're freshly picked. I hope you're hungry. I have baked Cornish hen in the oven. I brought over a port wine and some cassette tapes."

Michael heard *Tin Man* playing in the background. "Dewey Bunnell wrote the lyrics to *Tin Man*, didn't he?"

Michael sang some of the words: "But Oz never did give nothing to the Tin Man, that he didn't, didn't already have..."

Perfect timing for the song, Michael thought. "Thanks for making supper. I appreciate when someone does something without being asked."

How was he going to get out of this? He could have a quick supper, sex, and make an excuse to leave for a while. He didn't see another option since he didn't want to pass on Jenny.

"Let's eat; I'm famished." Michael pulled Angela's chair out. "Then I need some time in bed with you."

Angela smiled because she already knew that Michael had a clandestine plan to meet with Jenny. Nevertheless, she couldn't spoil it for him, this time. There were bigger issues to deal with when Michael was ready for them.

"Thanks for being polite."

The dinner went fast. Not much conversation and Michael began to wonder if Angela knew he was up to something.

"You're a great cook," Michael commented. "You managed to keep such a good figure in spite of being a good cook."

"I've been a petite size for as long as I can remember," she replied.

"The dishes can wait 'til later. Let's go upstairs and talk." Michael led Angela up the steps.

"This bed is so comfortable," Michael thought. "Almost wish I could just go to sleep."

He wasted no time running his hands along her thighs and toward her nerve centers. It took Angela less than a minute to have her first orgasm. She ran her hands all over Michael, as she moaned and thrust her hips forward. Michael didn't hold back much either. She was a sex kitten. They changed position. She was on her knees, and he had taken the dominant position. Michael sang his own version of *From Me To You* by the Beatles as it played in the background. "I like your choice of songs, Angela," Michael commented.

Angela came for the third time, and Michael joined her. They both fell on their backs in the bed, as they held hands.

"Angela, I promised a friend I would meet 'em for a few hours; do you mind?"

"No, honey. I'll wait for you and watch some television until you get home," she replied.

Michael thought for a moment but decided not to ask her to go home. He figured he could see Jen and still get back in time to catch a few hours of sleep before he had to get up for work.

Angela turned to Michael and asked, "Do you know about the nuclear program in the United States?"

Michael looked puzzled.

"I spent several years in the Navy. I should know something about atomic power," he responded.

"No need to get defensive."

"I'm sorry. What were you trying to tell me?" Michael tried to act calm, but his impatience at the timing of the question was showing.

"Oppenheimer helped make America's first atomic bomb. He was quoted when speaking about atomic power: 'I would not make atomic weapons, at least not to start with, but would build enormous plants, and would design these plants in such a way that they could be converted with maximum ease and minimum time delay to the production of atomic weapons, just in case somebody two-times us. That way we would stockpile Uranium, keep as many of our developments secret as possible, and locate our plants, not where they would do the most good for the production of power, but where they would do the most good for protection against enemy attack.'

"Do you find his insight interesting, Michael?" Angela asked. "What does that tell you about human nature?"

"Are you saying people are sneaky?" Michael replied. "Do you think I'm being sneaky?"

"You got the main message," Angela smirked. "This friend...is it a woman?"

"No need to get pernickety, dear." Michael went from feeling gratified to slightly pissed off for getting caught. He got out of bed and showered.

"I don't mind, Michael. I already know you're mine. I'd only be jealous if there was a hint that you might repeat this behavior," Angela explained as she stood at the door to the bathroom.

"I'll be home in a few hours." Michael was rattled but he did not want to show it.

"It's as if she can read my mind," he thought.

It was nearing seven o'clock. Michael had to drive slowly to read the address on the mailbox. There it was: Box 21. It was a two-story, executive ranch-style house. Red-stained cedar slats covered the outside. The driveway curved around, running by the front porch. The land was filled with Pine, Walnut, Red Maple, Apple, and Cherry trees, and the grass looked like Prairie Dropseed. When Michael exited his Ford, the smell of popcorn confirmed his suspicion on the grass. Patches of wildflowers dotted the landscape.

Jenny had opened the entry door and now stood behind the outer screen door. She was dressed in double-pleated black slacks, a white silk georgette blouse, a pine single-button blazer, and black sling-back shoes with insets. Jenny was a natural blonde with brown highlights. She had green eyes and was drop-dead gorgeous. She wore Acqua di Parma perfume. One could only guess what was in it. Michael thought it might be the formula for love potion number nine.

Michael did a double take. "You look ready for a black tie event, and I'm in my khaki mesquite pants and cotton Windsor shirt. I feel underdressed. But, I'm clean. You look wonderful. Do you have your own hair stylist and make-up artist at your beck and call?"

"I've learned to be creative in my ways. Do you like what you see? I have wine or liquor of your choice. Would you like a drink?"

"Harvey Wallbanger. No garnish, please. Double on the vodka. Let me watch you float the Galliano in the orange juice."

"Are you a French connoisseur, Michael?" Jenny asked.

"No, I just like to inflate my ego before I get intoxicated. We could skip the drink. You're intoxicating enough for me." Michael looked on as Jenny gave him a sexy glance.

"Taking my time is half the fun of foreplay. I need you to loosen up, Michael. Word around town is you are a womanizer. That isn't true now, is it?" Jenny inquired.

"Give me the name of the source and I'll clarify the comment," Michael spoke in a larkish tone.

Jenny had removed her blazer and was running her hands through Michael's hair.

"I dreamt about tonight, Michael. You were shy in high school. I never got that date with you, then. But, I wish I had. You're here now, though. We can make as much noise as we want and no one will hear us out here."

"I still think Hollywood is callin' yah. You've twice the beauty of Daryl Hannah. You have that kind of natural beauty that cavemen scribbled on walls over," he quipped.

"Hell, I'll scribble on the walls for you."

Jenny sat on her sofa. It was part of a four-piece sectional made of white fabric and leather, called a Toledo. She looked like a Barbie doll sitting poised in a playhouse. However, she was real, and Michael wanted to play with the real thing.

"You said your last relationship was with a married man?" Michael asked.

Michael realized it was too late to take back the question. Oh Lord, what kind of issue was that question going to open up?

"It's still too soon to talk about," she replied, much to his relief.

"Come here and make me forget the past," she said in a quiet voice.

Just then, the telephone rang. Jenny answered.

"Yes, may I ask who is calling?"

"Someone named Angela is asking for you," Jenny held her hand over the telephone. "Are you here?"

Michael thought for a moment. There was no way she could know where he was. Even if she had followed him, Jenny's number was unlisted. Would she have been so low as to go through his pants pocket while he showered? Michael motioned to Jenny that he was not there.

"I'm sorry. I don't know a Michael," Jenny replied.

"Tell the Michael that you don't know that I'm going home for the night, and he can give me the details later," Angela replied, as she hung up her telephone.

"Michael, are you living with someone?" Jenny inquired.

"Just my dog. Her name is Tess, and she has been my companion for about three years now," Michael grinned. "I have a new neighbor who has lived next to me for about a week. She's been over a couple of times. I think she's trying to mark me as her territory."

"You and I go back a long time, Michael. I know you're an honest *sailor*. I could see someone wanting to do that with you," Jenny smirked. "Do you remember the house I lived in when I was in high school?"

"Yeah, it was right next to the corner of the sports activity field," Michael answered. "Why do you ask?"

"I vowed I'd never live poor again. I was embarrassed to invite people over, because we had no furniture. I was ashamed of where I had come from." Jenny described her situation further: "I have money now. I could live in the city, but this home is paid for and I have privacy. It's just close enough to Harborview that I feel connected to the community I grew up in."

"Now, what would you like to do that you haven't done in a long time?" Michael inquired.

"This bottle of wine is empty. We could play spin the bottle." Jenny had alluring, strong, and sensual eyes.

"I'll take my shirt off now, if you'll let me help you with yours, Jenny."

Michael took Jenny's hand and kissed it. Then he unbuttoned her top button.

"Would it be audacious if I asked for a kiss?" Michael asked.

"Not at all." Jenny put her arms around Michael's neck and showed she was a ferocious kisser and a hot-blooded lover. It was as if the fury of a volcano had been unleashed.

She made Michael feel, for a moment, as if he were just a big farm boy. That feeling passed quickly as the passion intensified. She was a voracious lover. Michael remembered his adolescent yearnings from high school; then, he had only dreamt about moments like this.

"How could Heaven feel better than this?" Michael thought.

"I've wanted you to notice me since the sixth grade," Jenny moaned.

They never made it to the bedroom. All the lights in the living room were on, and there they were, making mad, passionate love on the floor, in front of the sofa. Michael was glad Angela had not kept him from his appointment. He wondered if this would be like some of his other friendships, a burst of passion then a passing hello. He hoped for more.

"I hope I don't scare you away, because that happened so spontaneously."

"I felt unrestrained too. You've been at the top of my list of most desired and least obtainable. I don't understand why, but to me you seemed to have wisdom beyond your years. You were intimidating to several people I knew. You were wanted by many," Michael responded.

"As an exotic dancer, I'm still wanted by many. Those men want me for only one reason, though. They want to own me and use me to make themselves look more masculine. They think of me as an object with no mind of my own. You've probably heard this comment before from women, who do my kind work, haven't you?" Jenny inquired.

"Don't underestimate yourself. I see you as Jenny Hayden, superstar! You are an astonishing human being and an amazing friend. I saw a side of you tonight

that I wish I'd gotten to know before. You're older and wiser. Nevertheless, your beauty has always been a natural thing for you. When you were still in school, it may have worked against you, because you seemed too complex. You could've put all the cheerleaders and prom queens to shame. Now they aren't even in the running." Michael realized what time it was and politely said good by.

Chapter 9

It was nearly five in the morning, and Michael had to be to work by seven. Tess was wagging her tail as he came in the door. Michael ran upstairs, showered, shaved, and put his work clothes on. There was a card lying on the bed. He didn't have time to open it. He made the drive to the BerAl plant in record time. It was fifteen minutes before he had to punch in. A representative from the Hazardous Material Safety Administration, HAZMAT, was there to interview people about the incident surrounding Bobby Craft's injury.

Michael changed into the plant uniform and said good morning to all of his coworkers. BerAl was well known by the scientific community for making Beryllium domes, cylinders, and beam pipes for various uses. More specifically, the metal had special properties when used in nuclear technologies. This plant had made products used in Brookhaven, Fermi, Daresbury, Argonne, and many top secret government projects. The plant ran the entire process for manufacturing the Synchrotron Beamline windows." It used a state-of-the-art, low temperature, metal fabrication process. Materials in BerAl products included Copper, Aluminum, Titanium, Stainless Steel, and Beryllium. As one might surmise, chemicals with varying degrees of caustic qualities had to be used for part of the manufacturing process. The plant kept safety at the top of its priorities. Michael spent his day checking overload switches in areas that required a respirator. The HAZMAT specialist, Mr. Moralis, was a short, thin, sickly, freckle-face, nerd. Who looked like he could not find his way out of a wet paper bag. He was a legend in his own mind and a bit of a hot head. He was teased as a child and thought his position could hide his insecurities, but he showed his true colors by

being a little prick. He had waited until the last part of Michael's shift to interview him.

"Mr. Simon, I want you to tell me, in your own words, what happened the day the barrel of solvent fell on Bobby Craft," said Moralis.

Michael told Moralis what happened from about noon that day until he left the hospital that evening.

"You seem able to recall the details vividly, Mr. Simon. I don't have any more questions for now. If I need more information, I'll be in contact. Oh, one last thing: has anything unusual happened to you in the past week that might have any bearing on the incident at the plant?" Moralis asked.

Michael was taken back by the question. What was that comment supposed to imply? He thought to himself that perhaps one of the company execs was trying to find a fall guy. He started to do a slow burn and assumed the interviewer could see that change in his facial expression.

"Nothing at all," Michael replied.

Moralis closed his folder and turned off his tape recorder. "Thank you for your time. You have a good evening, sir."

"Just like in the Navy," Michael thought. "Someone is looking to keep their name clean and cover up the whole incident."

Michael had seen the shady side of the government in the past. He may be working for a publicly owned company, but he knew it was under the secrecy umbrella of the government's military program.

When Michael arrived home, he saw Lenny was waiting for him in the driveway, chain smoking.

"Lenny, come in. It was a hell of a day at work, and it is time for a beer. Do you want one?"

"Yeah, I need it." Lenny looked like a mouse caught in a trap.

"Michael, we have been friends for a long time, right?" Lenny inquired. "You know I may overreact sometimes too, right?"

"Yeah, not in years, though. Okay, Lenny, just what's on your mind? Are you and Linda fighting again?" Michael asked.

"No, it might be worse than that. Your neighbor Angela, well..." Lenny hesitated.

"Finish your beer. I have to walk Tess. You can tell me while we walk," Michael replied.

Out the door they went, toward Memorial Park, the biggest park in town and one that had plenty of room for Tess to run. Besides, it was nearing the middle of May, and the Harborview baseball league was practicing there. Lenny kept rub-

bing his hands together, something he had done since junior high school. They arrived at the park in eight minutes. Michael sat on the edge of a bleacher, and Lenny sat next to him. They were among a dozen people who were watching a baseball preseason game in progress. Michael let Tess walk around near the seating area.

"Okay, Lenny, what's bothering you?"

"It's about Linda. Remember the other night I had to take her to the emergency room?"

"Yes."

"Well, she told me this morning what she thought made her have the acute asthma attack," Lenny continued. "She said Angela told her Earth is going to be destroyed soon."

"You're kidding, right?" Mike asked.

"No."

"Angela said she was some kind of alien." Lenny put his cigarette out. "Linda told me, Angela claimed there were thousands of underground cities around the world ready to live in."

Lenny paced as he spoke. "Angela said some of the salt mines under Cleveland were part of the underground living quarters and that they connected to Camp Perry. I know it sounds weird. I only half believe it myself. But, Linda got sick just after their conversation."

Michael retorted, "I didn't know we even had salt mines under Cleveland."

"I'm telling you this because we are close friends," Lenny took in a deep breath. "I think you have some kind of nut living next to you, Michael. Have you been screwing her? If you have, you might want to stop! You might find parts on her that can suck the life out of yah. If that happened, I wouldn't know how to write your obituary."

Michael asked, "You always were a better jokester than me, Lenny. Do you think Angela is some kind of little green alien?"

"I didn't say she was little or green. But, the other part, I'm not sure about," he replied.

"Take some serious advice from your close friend. Stop screwin' her. You might catch a disease they can't cure. When they look at it through a microscope, it will look like little space invaders. You and I played that video game often enough. You know what I'm talking about." Even now, Lenny had a good way of taking the tension out of a serious conversation.

"Okay, I get your point. Besides, she's been acting a little creepy the last two days. It's like she can read my mind," Michael responded. "Linda really got sick over that?"

"Yeah, you saw how sick Linda got. She's convinced Angela is something from out of this world; she doesn't want to come over to your house ever again as long as Angela lives next door." Lenny replied.

"Hey, that's too harsh," Michael, remarked. "Tell Linda I'll try to learn more about Angela. But tell her not to take things so seriously."

"You know Linda. She is a bundle of nerves," Lenny continued.

"Yeah, I do. But, maybe there is more to what she said than we are giving her credit for," Michael admitted. "I need a milkshake. Do you have time to go to LuAnn's and get something to eat?"

"Yeah, I need a burger. They cook 'em better there than I'll ever get at home," Lenny smirked.

"While we're on the subject, have you seen Lou around lately?" Michael wondered.

"You didn't hear? He just got out of prison. He did two years at Mansfield Penitentiary for selling dope to some undercover DEA agents, from his place north of town. The dumb shit didn't heed our warnings about being a stoner. He thought he was so damn smart when he tried to claim that he was Rastafarian and could use cannabis in his religion."

"You remember, he thought he could outwit the law when we were growing up. His father was there to bail him out of jail all the time. Then his parents moved to Arkansas; and he continued to do the dope, read his novels, and listen to Hendrix music. I hadn't seen him in years. Turns out, he was selling dope for quite a while. I saw him once briefly since he has been out of jail. Last I heard, he was living in between Fostoria and Toledo selling tropical fish." Lenny had an odd look on his face.

"Barry Gibson is working in Detroit in a transvestite drag revue and looks like Joan Collins, according to Jenny Hayden. Jenny said Barry was hoping to get a chance to play in the TV series *Dynasty*. Hey, someone in this town needs to make it big. I would prefer to see a football star come from Harborview. Nevertheless, we need something to put us on the map."

Michael grinned. "Did you know Jenny is an exotic dancer in Toledo? I went over to her house for a few hours last night."

"Did she do a pole dance for you?" Lenny lit a cigarette.

Some might think that Lenny's comment was brazen, but he had a knack for getting to the truth with some of his bold comments.

"We got away with a lot of shenanigans when we were growing up. Maybe we're just lucky that we turned out okay."

"What we did, my friend, is the stuff of legends," Lenny swatted at a mosquito. "Besides, who said we turned out okay?"

Michael and Lenny sat in the two Adirondack Chairs near the lilac bush in the side yard. The lilac bush next to them was starting to blossom with pinkish-purple flowers. Honeybees flew back and forth between the flowers and their new hives. Late spring was in full gear. Even the smell of apple blossoms, from neighboring trees, filled the air.

Lenny looked toward the Hutton house, "I haven't seen Angela around today."

"Me either. She managed to call for me at Jenny's house last night, and I noticed there was a card on the bed when I got home this morning. I haven't read it. I'm not sure I want to. She has gotten very possessive since she moved in next door." Michael figured it was still his prerogative to run his own life.

"I told ya! She's got her hooks in you, Mike, can't yah see it?" Lenny stretched and yawned. "Call me in a couple of days. I've got to get home and get some sleep."

"Thanks for coming over, Lenny. I'll take your advice and try to find out what Angela was talking about."

Michael went into the house feeling exhausted. All he could think of was sleeping. He looked at his answering machine and saw it was flashing. He took a quick shower and got under the covers. Mike picked up the envelope on the bed and opened it up.

The front of the card showed a field of yellow tulips with a pretty woman holding a flower in her hand. Michael opened it. It read, "The last week with you has left my 'tulips' aching for you. I love you."

Michael thought for a moment. "I can't be upset with her. She's the best thing that has ever come into my life. I think I am in love with her, too."

He turned the telephone ringer off and went to sleep.

Chapter 10

Tuesday morning came quickly. Michael felt refreshed. His day at work was uneventful. He was home by 5:30 PM, thinking about what he and Lenny had spoken of the day before, as he took Tess for her afternoon stroll.

Today was a long walk, all the way to the Kelly Pickle Plant. It was owned by a local family and did a booming business in the fall. Local farmers brought in pickles and tomatoes for processing into canned pickles, ketchup, relish, and assorted condiments. Not much was going on now. Michael had worked at the plant for a few weeks when he was fifteen years old. He remembered unloading the trucks as they arrived and putting the pecks of tomatoes onto a conveyor belt. The tomatoes fell into a big vat of boiling water as they reached the end of the conveyor, and a worker caught the empty basket and stacked it. After the tomatoes cooked in the metal tank, workers peeled the skins from them.

One day, several workers on the main platform waited for a truck to back up to the loading dock. The supervisor told people to pick up tomatoes that had fallen. Someone needed to go below the deck to get the ones that had fallen to the ground. While a worker was on the ground and under the platform, Dan took the opportunity to tell him to look up. He did, as Dan smashed a big tomato into the space between the slats.

“Now that’s how yah make ketchup!” he proudly exclaimed.

The migrant worker came running up the steps and onto the platform, with his switchblade knife open, and came at several workers. Luckily, Dan was good at running and went to the inside of the building until the worker cooled down.

Then there was the issue of fair wages. Michael didn't think the wage was fair at two dollars an hour. So, he and Dan talked about how to slow the conveyor line down and came up with an idea. The peck-sized basket of tomatoes had to be free for the person at the end of the conveyor to catch it as it turned over. They figured a way to foul the assembly process. Maybe they could tie two or three baskets together before they reached the end of the conveyor. Then, total mayhem would occur and shut down the line. Sure enough, Dan tied two baskets together with twine. Three, then four baskets turned over at the same time. Tomatoes went everywhere, and the workers got a siesta. The plant supervisor caught on quickly, and that game was ended when Dan and Michael got fired.

The Kelly Pickle Plant sat the end of Howe Street and adjacent to the Norfolk and West railroad. Trucks brought most of the fresh produce in. However, the finished product left by rail. This was the spot where Ron Deutsche, for reasons unknown, had lost his life to a train. He was one of several people Michael had the fortune to know. Ron had been laid to rest out at Union Cemetery. Michael stood in silence and tried to recall the time he spent with Ron and how his life had been taken. It seemed so quickly forgotten. He knew he would not forget. It was like war. The heroes were always the ones who sacrificed their life at an early age, so that the rest of society could flourish. Michael saw a part of Ron that was loyal and noble, had he lived perhaps these traits would have earned him some great social standing.

"So long, Ron, my friend, until I come by this way again," Michael thought as he walked his dog, Tess, away from the plant, back to Halley Street, and toward home.

As Michael strolled down Halley Street, he tried to remember who had lived where. He had once delivered papers for the Harborview, *Daily*, newspaper. He was sure some of his customers were now gone or moved away. Funny thing, when he looked back to that time, it was as if the whole town had been his. He knew everyone and everyone knew him. Michael felt his only option was to return to this town after being discharged from the Navy.

Historians said that Harborview had become a town around 1835. The settlers who had traveled there from Pennsylvania named it. It was made up of patches of swampy land. Great quantities of virgin timber grew throughout the area, and wild game—such as turkey, pheasant, and beaver—was plentiful. As settlers from the eastern part of America trekked westward, this land was purchased by speculators and had originally been named Wellington. Wellington was one of the land speculators who came to live on the land he purchased. He

had his goods sent to him down the Crane River from Toledo. Wellington built a store, with the help of other settlers, along the bank of the river.

The opening of the Wellington store caused other settlers to come and purchase smaller plots of land. A wood mill to process the lumber was built.

Wellington continued to expand the community by donating portions of his land holdings for a church and even a courthouse. He and other town members intended to make Wellington the county seat of Oak County. The county had been established about 1841, aptly named after the plentiful Oak trees. The county seat, however, was later given to Bass City, located to the east of Wellington.

In 1856, Wellington had its name changed to Harborview in part because it now had a post office and a harbor. Lumber milling and farming were the largest businesses to carry Harborview into the 1870s. The Civil War also had an effect on Harborview. The town's cemetery was named Union Cemetery in honor of the soldiers who had served in the Union Army and to those who had fallen.

Crane River, named after the birds of the area, was used for transportation and fishing. Boats commonly ran from Harborview to the Lake Erie islands, where Michael had become so fond of fishing.

After a large amount of timber was cleared, farming increased. Many of the roads were still made of dirt. Gradually, wood, stone, and eventually brick replaced the dirt. Brick was also used to resurface many of the buildings of the town. Brick helped to act as a fire barrier. Nearly every small community of that time, including Harborview, had individuals who formed companies to make money and take advantage of the local resources.

Besides wood and farming, several general stores, leather shops, dairies, blacksmith shops, brickyards, hatcheries, and even a saloon or two came to Harborview. By 1911, the town had its own stage and opera house. People formed a business association as a way to share ideas and guarantee community stability. Then a municipal water system, electricity, and natural gas came to town, although many homes would still use coal and wood to heat their homes for decades to come. Municipal water came from two pump stations that got water from several local wells. The water was hard and had to be treated to remove the calcium and magnesium. When limewater softening was available, the soap would lather up. The water also tasted better after the hardness was removed.

Harborview had its own armory and a small detachment of soldiers from the Ohio National Guard, and the town participated in providing supplies to the troops during World War I.

In 1917, the Spanish flu hit Harborview and caused hundreds of deaths as well as the demise of many local businesses.

By the 1930s, cars were replacing the horse-drawn carriages. The Crane River Bridge was built across the Crane River in 1934. It was made from steel and concrete. Its opening was followed by a weeklong celebration. The water that had been supplied to the community from the two wells was put on temporary hold. This occurred when a ten-inch water pipe was built from Bass City to Harborview. With the advent of chlorination, safe water was abundant.

Then World War II came, and the town of Harborview again pulled together. Some men went off to war. The families that stayed behind held metal drives, rubber drives, and even cooking oil drives. They sent the oil to help lubricate bearings on military vehicles. Harborview residents enthusiastically supported the troops.

After VJ Day, Harborview began to draw business again. The Erie Army Proving Grounds was built. The BerAl Beryllium Company was built, on the south side of Crane River, and provided several jobs for the community.

Metal shops, rubber products, lumber, farming, boat parts, manufacturing, and canneries all continued to flourish in the community.

For many, this was a fun place to live. The river provided a source of boating, swimming, and fishing. Hunting of game was on the upsurge, and Harborview looked like a community on its way to new growth in business.

Michael didn't realize it, but the best times, perhaps the most industrious times, in Harborview may have already come and gone, as fast food companies began to pop up and industry was moving closer to Toledo, Cleveland, and other larger metropolitan areas. Many companies were even moving their manufacturing to other countries.

Angela did not seem to have a history in the town, yet Michael knew that she had been there all along. She had spoken about receiving her first pair of ice skates when she was nine years old. Angela told Michael that her father had worked as a newspaper editor in Toledo. She described to Michael how her parents would read to her and her sisters and they said she had come from a special place. From every thing, Michael had seen so far she really had come from somewhere special. Angela had made him feel love in a way that he had never felt before. He found himself feeling more complete when he was with her and somehow empty when they were apart. Their relationship was not just a physical one. Their bond had evolved into something deeper, into one of trust. Even though they were both busy with other activities in their lives, Michael's thoughts of Angela were always just beyond the immediate issue at hand.

Days came and went. Michael and Angela spent more time together. Plans of a wedding were not out of the question. The whole subject of aliens and world catastrophes had not been discussed.

In the last week of June 1985, Angela sat Michael down.

"Now, there is something I need to tell you, Michael."

"Don't tell me, let me guess; you are not really Angela. You are an alien posing as Angela, right?" Michael chided her.

"That's not exactly what I had in mind to say."

"I'm sorry; what did you have to say, honey?"

"Michael, you're going to be a father," Angela replied.

You could have heard a pin drop. Even Tess lifted her head and stared. Michael was dumbfounded.

"Sweetheart, surely someone taught you about the birds and the bees, didn't they? I know America is the land of milk and honey, but I wasn't expecting a baby. Aren't you using birth control, Angela?"

"Michael you really are dense, aren't you. I am having your baby, and that is that."

"My baby, why my baby?" Michael was still in shock. "Girl or a boy? This is too much, Angela. I don't know how to be a father. Yeah it's been good between us; but if we are in a parenting way, I will have to marry you, won't I?"

"Do you want to marry me, Michael?"

"I feel like we already are. But, what about my freedom? What about seeing other people?"

"When was the last time you saw someone else? No, let me answer that. It was the first week of May and her name was, let me see...." Angela put her finger to her lip as she stared at the wall momentarily.

"Oh yeah, it was Jenny Hayden, your dreamboat from high school. Did you know she is living with another man now?" Angela paused to let Michael collect his thoughts.

"No, now that you mention it, I did not know that."

"Since we are on the subject, how's it going to look for a new English teacher to come to her first day of school pregnant?" Michael wondered.

"Perfectly normal, Michael. Women have been having babies for a very long time now," she retorted.

"Wow, it just hit me. I'm going to have a baby!" Michael ran to the telephone.

"Linda? Is Lenny there? This is Michael. I am pregnant. I mean, Angela is pregnant and we're getting married," Michael blurted.

"Lenny, now I know why you said I should lighten up with Angela. We are going to have little space invaders. I am going to be a father like you, old buddy." Michael was acting tipsy.

"Calm down, Michael. You'll give yourself a hernia or something. Then you'll be no good to anyone, including your friends," Lenny replied. "You're sounding harebrained. I'm the one who usually does that. You really must be in a tizzy."

"Hey, I need to ask Angela something. I'll call you back, Lenny." Michael hung up the telephone.

"I'm in love with you, Angela. Will you have my baby? No. No. I meant, will you marry me?" Michael was getting weak at the knees.

"I would love to be your wife, Michael. Was that a proposal?"

"It sure was! Yippee! I never even thought I would get married until today, until this very moment." Michael was almost out of breath. "I am having a quickening moment."

President Reagan had proclaimed June as "Family Reunion Month." Michael didn't know exactly what the president was referring to, but he was glad he now had a family.

"Angela, I am so happy. I love you more than anything in the world. Now I have a reason to focus on the future. Having a child together will only cement our bond. Would you like to go to Toledo tomorrow? We could go to the art museum or the zoo."

"I would love too. I need to tell Lynn Williams I'll not be available to watch her daughters. If I can break that engagement, I'm yours for the whole day," Angela replied.

"While you take care of things, I have to go into the basement and replace the ignition switch on the gas furnace."

Michael gathered the tools he thought he would need. He went into the basement with the ignition switch replacement kit he had purchased at the hardware store. The furnace was old. It was a coal-burning stove many years before and had been converted to a gas furnace sometime before Michael could remember.

The furnace room was one step lower than the other rooms in the basement. The floors were originally brick and had been covered over with concrete in most places. Michael had been told many years ago that the ol' Kilmer house he lived in dated back to 1860 and was built by a prominent family that had operated a lumber mill. The house had been constructed from what appeared to be the best lumber and materials, as was obvious when looking at the floor support beams and the rafters in the attic.

The furnace was ducted just to the first floor. Heat radiated into the second story through open grated ducts that had been built into the upper floors. Whoever designed the house knew what they were doing.

As Michael opened the combustion chamber after turning off the gas, he was surprised to see how badly worn the whole assembly was. He returned to town and bought the parts to replace all the natural gas assembly as well. The work took him into the night, and he had to use his utility light in addition to the lights that were installed in the basement. Finally, at about 10 PM, he was done and lying against the east wall, looking at the furnace.

Michael thought he saw something coming from the west wall. But that was impossible. He turned off his utility light. Something was still giving off light. He turned off the light to the furnace room. Still, a glow seemed to be coming from behind the brick wall. Michael ran upstairs and told Angela to come down and look. Angela came into the furnace room.

"All the lights are off in here, Angela. Do you notice anything odd?"

"No, but all the lights must not be off, because that room is still lit up," Angela replied.

"Okay, so it is not just my imagination?"

"No, Michael, I see the light, too. Where is it coming from?" She continued.

"It looks like it's coming from behind the wall," Michael responded.

"I am too tired to investigate it tonight. I plan on spending all day tomorrow with you.

Did you decide where you wanted to go?" He inquired.

"Yes, honey, I want to go to the Toledo Art Museum. I have never been there, and I have been told it is one of the best art museums in the eastern United States," she answered.

Michael said, "I don't think you'll be disappointed. They have some of the best paintings in the world, and it has a roof that lets light in naturally."

"I know it's late, but do you want something to eat? You haven't eaten all day. I bought some scampi because I know how much you look forward to eating it when we go out. Would you like a salad, dinner rolls, and some scampi?"

"And we have the finest wine cellar in all of Harborview!" Michael was having a fit of hysterics.

"We don't have a wine cellar, silly."

"I know. I was just daydreaming about the movie, *The Time Machine*. Do you remember when the guests were drinking the wine and waiting for George to return?"

"We do have the right conditions in this cellar for setting up a wine rack. Maybe I will build one for you after we get married."

Michael thought his jokes were getting out of hand.

"Sweetheart, Tess has been waiting all day to go for a walk. Do you have a minute to take her outside?" Angela asked.

"Sure. I'll take her out for a little while. I need to break the news to her that we are having a baby. Tess is going to be an aunt, now." Michael beamed.

Angela laughed at the comment about Tess—so hard it brought tears to her eyes. "She has been your number one. She has some adjusting to do."

"Do you need anything from the grocery store? I can walk Tess toward town."

"We are out of milk and could use a loaf of bread," Angela remarked.

Michael took Tess, kissed Angela on the lips, walked down the steps and toward downtown. He started humming the song *Downtown*, which Petula Clark made famous. Fink's Family Market was open. That was unusual.

"Don't you close by ten, Ernie?" Michael wondered.

"Yeah, but I have some stocking to do. So, I decided to take some business away from Mel's Market. What can I get yah, Mike?"

"Gallon of milk, loaf of whole wheat bread, one pound of margarine, five-pound bag of sugar, and some flowers for my fiancée," Michael answered.

"Fiancée?" Ernie asked.

"Do you believe you reap what you sow, Ernie?"

"I suppose I do. Why?"

"You have to keep it a secret until I announce it. Angela has accepted my proposal to marry her. I'm in love for the last time. The ol' ball and chain is coming. But, I'm too star struck to care. You have a mix of flowers there? What should I take back with me?"

"My wife is in the stockroom. Would you like her to put together an arrangement for you? She'll put some baby's breath in there for good measure."

"Don't say anything to her about what I just said, Ernie. Promise me." Michael gestured for Ernie to keep silent.

"My lips are sealed. Cross my heart, hope to die if I should tell a lie. Do I have to swear on a bible too?" Ernie snickered.

"Ernie, I trusted you even before you crossed your heart," Michael said.

"Emily, I need you up front to help a customer. Besides, I think you're sitting back there doing crosswords," Ernie spoke in a loud tone.

Emily came out and smiled. She was a pretty woman. Giving birth to three daughters did not seem to age her. She was a woman with purpose, had the abil-

ity to do four things at the same time, and was adjusting the labeler, stamping cans, and arranging the flowers all at once.

"Someday they'll have a word to describe someone like you, Emily. You can do five things at once and not skip a beat," Michael commented.

Ernie rang up the groceries. He put the flowers in white, waxed paper and covered it with another grocery bag.

"Can I get you anything else?" Ernie asked.

"Since Emily is in the back again, you could direct me to a good jeweler. I want to find Angela an engagement ring that is special, like a diamond with rose petals around it."

Ernie pointed toward town. "Lander's Jewelers is reasonable. If you tell Bill I sent you, after the price quote he'll drop it another ten percent. It's a business courtesy discount. If that is still too much, you know there is plenty of choice in Toledo. There is always the Five and Dime store down the street."

Michael rubbed his chin, "You haven't lost your sense of humor after all these years, Ernie. Thanks for being open so late. Your prices are almost the same as Mel's. I think I'm gonna start coming here for all my produce. Tell Emily thanks again. Remember, let me make the announcement. This kind of news travels like a wildfire in Harborview," Michael said in jest as he headed out the door.

The walk back to the house was quick. Tess had behaved well when Michael kept her in the grocery store with him.

"Hey beautiful, I'm back. Did you notice I was gone?"

"In here!" Angela yelled.

"What's the matter, baby?"

"It's called morning sickness; but different things can set it off, like smells. The scampi smelled good at first, but then it made me nauseous. I'm fine now. Let's eat." Angela reached over and kissed Michael.

"Love goes where my Angela goes, and nobody knows like me," Mike sang. "Here some flowers for you."

"Thank you, Michael. I appreciate every kind thing that you do for me." Angela unwrapped the package and trimmed the stems on the flowers at an angle. She brought out a crystal vase and filled it with tap water mixed with lemon juice, sugar, and a touch of bleach before placing the stems into the water.

Angela looked at Michael. "Roses, gladiolus and calla lilies are a perfect combination for romance. Who picked these flowers out?"

"Ernie's wife, Emily, helped me put the arrangement together."

"She did an excellent job," Angela remarked.

It was midnight before they went to bed. Michael was still curious about the basement. He told Angela he would be right back and went back into the basement. He could see that a light was coming from the furnace room.

Michael took a screwdriver and knocked some of the plaster out from between two bricks. The light had a pale, bluish-green color to it and seemed unnatural. Michael remembered hearing stories that the Kilmer house had been used in the 1860s to help slaves get to Canada.

He quietly spoke to himself: "I wonder if the light is some kind of ghost or something. I have to knock away more of that brick."

Michael began to chip away the brick with a chisel-tipped hammer. It came out quickly. The light got brighter as more brick and mortar was knocked away from the wall. He had removed two whole bricks now, and inside he could see something that looked like a corridor. Michael could not decipher where the light was coming from, but it was alluring and somewhat beautiful.

The light was white, yet it had a strange hue that lit other objects in the basement as a black light might. It seemed to be coming from the walls and the floor inside the corridor and was not something he would expect to see from an apparition. It looked like the whole corridor was illuminated with light.

Michael was excited but so tired he could hardly keep his eyes open. He took some duct tape and cardboard and taped over the opening in the wall. If anyone was going in there, it was going to be him. Mike always was an adventurous sort. It ran in his blood. He felt like he had just stumbled onto a buried treasure and did not want to share it with anyone until he knew what he had.

He thought to himself, "Wow, this is unbelievable."

If this was an entrance to something, he didn't believe it was for hiding slaves. That story about the Kilmer house being part of the Underground Railroad just didn't seem to be related to what Michael was seeing.

Michael returned to the bedroom but could not get to sleep, even though he was exhausted. "Angela, wake up, honey," he whispered.

"What is it, Michael?" Angela rubbed her eyes. "It must be two or three in the morning. Why aren't you asleep?"

"I can't get to sleep because of what I saw in the basement. Please put your robe on and come downstairs with me. If you see it, too, maybe I'll know that I'm not going crazy."

"All right, sweetheart, just hold my hand going down the steps. I took a pill for my nausea, and I'm still sleepy."

"Of course I'll hold your hand. Besides, I think I found some kind of treasure or ancient lost tunnel. It's giving off a pale, blue-green light that makes things in the furnace room seem to glow."

Angela walked behind Michael toward the furnace room. "Show me."

Michael got excited again. "When I remove the cardboard, you'll see it!"

"What *is* that?" Angela asked.

"It looks like a corridor that leads somewhere," Michael replied. "Take a look inside and tell me what you see."

Angela looked inside and paused. "Did you see the hieroglyphics on the sides of the walls? You have to look at the wall for a moment before the light allows you to focus."

Michael was mesmerized. "I do now that you point it out to me. I hope there is some kind of Rosetta stone in the text to help us decipher what the symbols mean. I can see symbols that the Egyptians used, such as the serpent, workers, and birds. There is a duck, a plow, and what looks like an oasis. Funny, I never thought this part of the world was dry."

"Honey, we can't do any more tonight. Let's go to bed. Are you going to take me to the art museum tomorrow, like you promised?" she was getting impatient.

"A promise is a promise," Michael commented.

Angela tugged at Michael's hand. "Come on, honey."

He taped the cardboard back in place and returned to the bedroom upstairs, almost immediately falling asleep. Michael had just gotten to sleep, and the dreams came flooding in.

First, he saw a people enslaved by a mortal that had a serpent's head. The serpent's eyes were very large, but the mouth just looked like a small slit. He could hear people screaming in terror. A flash of light, then hundreds of people lay dead around the area where they were quarrying rock. A circular aircraft flew over and cast a beam onto the bodies. They were turned to dust, never to be recognized as bodies again.

The dream did not stop there. A battle raged over control of the entire planet. The workers wore tunics and hemp sandals. They were being worked to death. Michael could see other humans who stood eight or nine feet tall. They seemed to be helping the workers get under cover.

Angela woke Michael up. "Honey, it's nearly nine-thirty. If we're going to the Toledo Art Museum, we had better leave soon."

Michael rolled out of bed, "You're right. Thank you for waking me. I was in the middle of my own version of *War of the Worlds*. I'll be ready to go in five minutes."

What they had found in the basement was fantastic. There was no getting around the fact that it was almost indescribable in its complexity and in their ability to understand was it represented. Michael had faced crises many times before, but never quite like this. It was a riddle, confusing, exciting, captivating and it boggled his mind, but he had to let it go for the time being. They needed a diversion, something to get his mind off this extraordinary find.

The drive to Toledo was quiet. The day had warmed to about eighty-five degrees, and there was a slight breeze. The air conditioning in the SUV was being used aptly. Michael looked at Angela and she smiled back. She had her left hand resting on his forearm.

Angela looked at Michael, "Is the Toledo Museum of Art all that you said it will be?"

"It has been a few years since I have been there. It's a splendid building with Roman columns and marble steps leading into the front entrance. When I was there before, they had sculptures, paintings, and glassworks. I heard the museum ranks among the finest in the United States. It has thousands of works of art. I can remember paintings from Monet, Van Gogh, Rembrandt, Picasso, Rubens, Miro, Kiefer, and Gainsborough. They have a couple dozen galleries. Plans are in the works right now to add a glass pavilion. The state of Ohio and Ohio State University, along with other endowments, are spending over \$300 million to renovate and expand the buildings. It is certainly a national treasure," Michael replied, as he adjusted the air conditioning.

When they arrived and parked, Angela looked at the outside of the marble building and was awestruck.

They walked inside. It was quiet and huge. They spent over three hours walking from room to room looking at paintings. Sometimes they would sit on the bench provided in each gallery room. It was all of what Michael had mentioned—modern art, sculptures, and much more.

"I could spend forever in here and still not get tired of all the beautiful objects displayed. We've been here for hours, Michael. It's enough for me. Imagine how much work it took to make some of the brass sculptures they have. I didn't expect to see so much eclectic work. I think I could take a nap now," Angela smiled as they walked toward the car. "It would take a week to see all the art in those buildings."

"Let's get some lunch before we head back home. Can you guess where I want to go?" Michael inquired. He felt he was drooling, thinking about shrimp and salad.

Michael swallowed and then spoke: "You were in one of the paintings. Did you see *Adoration of the Child* by Piero di Cosimo? You are much more beautiful, but the painting is about you. It is a mother looking over her newborn child."

Michael was truly in love with Angela, and she seemed to adore him. They were a team. They had become best friends. Michael thought that, perhaps while they were in Toledo, he could go to a jewelry store and find her an engagement ring and wedding band set.

Angela smirked, "Shave the beard from the man in *Portrait of a Musician*, and that could be you, Michael. The fruit in *Fruit, Flowers and Shells* looked good enough to eat. I tried to take an apple, but it was just out of reach."

Angela was very happy, and she held herself close to Michael as they walked toward the mall in Woodville.

Michael remarked to Angela, "I want to find a diamond ring for you that will scintillate. You deserve something fit for a queen. But, I'm on a laborer's budget. Since you already look like Venus, it will be difficult to find a ring good enough."

"The ring is a nice idea, Michael," Angela replied. "But just you, me, and our new baby—that's all I want."

"Now, don't forget Tess," Michael alluded to his favorite pet.

They walked to several different jewelry stores, and Angela's feet were getting sore.

"There's a gold band with your name on it, Michael. They even spelled it correctly."

"See the Aurora Borealis CZ silver ring? I will get you that just as a dinner ring. It's beautiful, even if it is cubic zirconium."

Michael held Angela's hand up and looked at it. "I know what I want for you, Angela. But, I don't see it here. I want a Black Hills gold ring with vines, leaves, and rose petals surrounding the main diamond, with three or four rubies inset around the diamond."

"Would you take that for a wedding ring?" Michael asked.

"It sounds beautiful and would look perfect on my ring finger. Let's just order it through a catalog if we don't see any in the stores."

They spent hours walking and looking through wedding-ring books. Good fortune struck when they returned to Harborview and found the ring Michael had described in a catalog at Bill Lander's jewelry store. It had an engagement ring that went with it.

Angela picked out a man's ring that showed two hands clutching a heart. It was completed with a crown, as an expression of lasting love and eternal friendship.

"I could not have picked a better ring than that. They have this ring for a woman, also. I want to get it for you to wear for everyday activities. That way, if I get lost, they will know who I belong to," Michael explained.

"Mr. Fink told me to tell you he sent me, Bill," Michael said to Bill Lander.

"Oh, you're sneaky. That gets you another ten percent off the price. Tell you what, I'll take fifteen percent off the price, because you used to deliver my paper," Mr. Landers remarked.

Michael wrote a check to cover the down payment on the rings, thanked Mr. Landers, and drove Angela back to their home.

"I've had a wonderful day. You treated me so special, Michael. You are going to get a treat tonight if you want one."

"I could never turn away from you. You have me by the...How did Lenny say it? Well, you get the drift. Would you like to walk the dog with me?"

"Sweetheart, I am going to run water for a bath, pour in some oils, and make myself smell like flowers. I'll fix us a snack and will be waiting for you when you return."

"We'll be back in a little while. Take your time soaking. I love you, baby." Michael turned and walked out the door, after kissing Angela.

Chapter 11

Michael thought about the day and how good Angela made him feel. He thought about how lucky he had it.

Then his thoughts changed. What was in the basement? What was that room? What made it glow? He had a fire inside him. He had to get back and tear the wall down. At the very least, he might find buried treasure. Michael walked into the house and unsnapped the chain from the dog's collar.

"Angela? Angela?"

"What, honey? I'm upstairs watching television," She replied.

"I'm going into the basement. Not to check the produce in the root cellar, either. I'm going to open that wall up!" Michael yelled up the staircase.

Angela walked down the front staircase. "No need to yell; I'm right here. I decided to come down to make sure you didn't get hurt."

"Oh, I don't think there is anything in there that could hurt me," he replied as he walked down the wooden steps. Five steps, turn, and then he climbed down another eight steps. "Thirteen steps, honey. I never noticed that before. I hope it's a lucky number for me."

"Never mind. I will be sitting in the room on this folding chair to see that no harm comes to you," Angela yawned as she sat down.

He appreciated her company, "Thanks for being a good sport about this and staying to see what gets discovered."

The wall began to give way to the blows from Michael's hammer. One brick at a time. Slowly, the corridor became more revealing. The walls glowed with light, and they seemed alive, almost moving.

"This reminds me of *The Philadelphia Experiment*. I'm not sure why. I don't know if there is any truth to that story, either. Nevertheless, sailors used to talk in the Navy about an electromagnetic field the government had created. I was told an escort destroyer named the *Eldridge* was in the Philadelphia Naval Yard. It had tons of electronic equipment on board. Scientists put together a huge array of magnets and power lines with the intent of trying to validate Albert Einstein's unified field theory. Through the manipulation of energy fields, they believed it was possible to make an object invisible. In this case, an entire destroyer would be invisible to radar and perhaps invisible to the enemy. Sometime late in October of 1943, the scientists onshore started the experiment by throwing switches and sending huge amounts of current throughout the ship. The ship vanished from view, and the scientists were shocked and amazed. A foggy green mist glowed in the area where the *Eldridge* had been. That's the reason. The color, the color of this corridor. It is giving off a glow that reminds me of that story. My imagination got away from me." Michael paused and looked at the corridor.

Angela told Michael to leave the whole thing alone. She got a bad feeling about the corridor.

He reassured her that there was nothing in there that could hurt him. Then he stepped inside.

Immediately, he felt energized. He had, in his mind, become a soldier in Germany named Hans Christian. His platoon had overrun and taken control of a water pumping station. They were looking for booby traps. Hans Christian thought that they had gotten them all.

"Oh, God, no!" Hans exclaimed.

Hans heard the explosion, and tried to get out; but the room was filling with water. It was over his head and he tried to hold his breath. He held it and held it. It hurt. Unbelievable pain! Hans thought he was dying, and no one would ever know what had happened. He was screaming inside. He had to breathe. He could see two of his friends had already started to go to the bottom of the chamber filled with water. Oh, God, why do I have to die in such an undignified fashion? Then he felt free of all pain. Yet, he was still there. Hans knew he could not breathe in water. Then he realized he was dead.

He was now Philippe, on a train waiting with two other people to jump off. They were running from someone. Philippe looked at his hands, they were the hands of a boy, and he was with his mother and sister. He was trying to protect them. Philippe was the man of the family now. They were being chased. Philippe motioned to his mother to come and follow him across the divided highway. He

made it to the other side and was calling to his sister and mother, but the traffic did not slow down.

"No!" Philippe yelled.

A truck hit his sister, Maria. How could he ever forgive himself? His mother made it to where he was and they ran and ran until they reached a warehouse where they found refuge in the cold building. Why had his sister gotten hit? Philippe wanted to kill himself. His mother would never forgive him for letting his sister, Maria, get hit by the truck. Philippe was in anguish as he watched his mother sobbing uncontrollably.

The scene changed yet again. A married man named Salazar, living with his wife and small son in a nice one-story house in a southern California town. They were arguing, and the child was in the room. He felt great resentment. The woman had forced him into the marriage, because she was pregnant. He was in a marriage that he did not want to be in.

Salazar's wife was calling him no good and worthless because he had lost his job as a construction worker. She had big plans to surround herself with material things. She claimed she was a starving actress looking to make it big, but she had been getting acting lessons from money he was providing. Now she was talking about leaving him and finding someone who could appreciate her for who she was. Salazar knew the child could feel the hate and knew that child felt fearful. He could feel the child's anxiety at seeing its security being shattered. Salazar knew that if this little human being saw too much of this, it would have a negative affect that could last the child's lifetime.

Then it went one step further, and Michael's identity became that of the child, Sebastian. Sebastian was now grown with children, and he felt angry, spiteful, hurt, and useless.

Michael was seeing into other people's lives and how each action affected the next. He realized that words were weapons. He saw thoughts and recognized they were energy forces that had substance.

Michael was hurled through time back to the Old West. He was in the body of a cold-blooded killer named Damek. The name meant Earth in Slavik. This creature would return again, again, and again to Earth, in an endless cycle of reincarnation without respite. In this life, he was of East European descent and a methodical, calculating murderer. He was living in San Francisco during the 1849 gold rush. Prostitution though immoral and wicked, was an accepted habit that was common in the city. Damek targeted the "ladies of the night." He was cold, heartless and ruthless in his methods of hunting, then killing women. No

woman deserved to die this way. Michael saw absolute evil in this monster, whose thoughts and deeds were terrifying.

When Damek was killed by the bullet from a Marshall's rifle, death came quickly. However, the evil soul went directly into the next incarnation. Now in a new body, he would continue his killing, like a wild animal completely out of control. Yet, just like a predator, he was cunning.

Boatman First Mate Marcus Swift was Michael's new identity. He was in the engine room of the *Eldridge*, a destroyer escort vessel (DE-173). Suddenly there was a bright light and deafening buzz. He was in a bluish-green haze and tried to feel his way to the exit. Men were screaming for their mothers. Others were dying. It seemed that time stood still. He moved in slow motion. It was surreal. He couldn't think well enough to get out of the hatchway. Then the humming stopped. Sailors screamed in an uncontrollable, horrible, fearful insane guttural tone. When he made it to the deck near the smoke stack, he was appalled by a sailor who was sticking halfway out of the armor plating. Others were missing limbs. Many lay dead on the deck.

Michael thought, "This is it. I'm going to die and never see Angela or the baby."

He had tapped into something, and he did not like it. Not one bit. He needed help to get away from all these horrible images. As he thought about needing help, Angela pulled him back into the furnace room. She yelled for him to wake up.

Angela was sobbing as she yelled, "Michael, Michael please don't die on me! Michael, can you hear me?" She slapped his face to get a reaction.

Michael's eyes rolled then began to focus on Angela. He wasn't sure if he was going to see something terrible again, so he covered his eyes with his arms and started to yell.

Michael curled into a fetal position. "No more! Please, don't let me see any more. I can't take it!"

Angela's tears rolled down her cheeks, and she sobbed in an almost inconsolable way, "Honey, it's me, Angela. No one is going to hurt you. You're all right. Please breathe! Take deep breaths!"

Michael was exhausted and seemed to be reaching for something, "Angela, please help me up. Let's get out of here. I can't believe what I just experienced."

"You are okay, sweetheart. You had me worried for a minute there. You were standing perfectly still when you took your first step into that corridor. Then you stayed in that spot and didn't move. It was as if something had a hold on you. I tried to talk to you, but you didn't respond. You didn't move for several minutes;

then you dropped to your knees, and sweat was pouring off of you.” Angela described what she had witnessed as she stood near the corridor, when Michael had stepped into it.

She put her arms around Michael’s neck and cried more. “I couldn’t stand it anymore so I grabbed your shirt collar and pulled you back out of there and into the basement.”

Michael panted while he spoke. “I’m feeling better. I think you may have saved my life. My entire personality disappeared, and I became other people. I experienced their feelings. I didn’t feel any happiness. That corridor has some kind of energy that appears to be made to keep people out. I have never felt hate like that. I felt so many emotions I don’t know where to begin. I saw a man who was evil personified, and I didn’t think that was possible. But he was truly evil incarnate. I don’t understand why God would let something like that exist. The pain in those emotions was beyond description.”

“I am going to take you to the emergency room.” Angela started to get the keys out of her purse.

“No, I’ll be okay. Just give me a few minutes. I feel safe again. I know where I am. Besides, who would believe a story like this?” Michael was feeling very foolish for not taking the corridor more seriously.

“You know the expressions—a mystery wrapped in an enigma or opening a Pandora’s Box—well I have done that and then some,” Michael said as Angela helped him up to the bedroom.

“I am going back in there. It didn’t kill me. I thought I was a goner toward the end. But, something needs to be learned in there. I have never been one to back away from something out of fear. In there, I felt fear. It was a fear that makes every part of your being scream in revulsion. I felt horror, hate, sorrow, embarrassment, humiliation, rage, loneliness, and a total loss of control. These are not feelings that are normal for me. I saw it through other people’s eyes and through their lives. That’s right, Angela. I was living out other people’s lives. It was a terrible experience.” Michael was trying to put into words what he had just experienced.

Sweat continued to roll off Michael’s forehead. “I spoke about *The Philadelphia Experiment* before going in, didn’t I? Well, I don’t think it is a joke anymore.”

“Why, Michael?”

Michael spoke with disgust as he held his head in his hands. “I was a sailor on the *Eldridge* in there. I want to make this government pay for what it did to those sailors. Those poor men! I saw my friends go blind. Others lost their minds.

Some sailors walked through objects and became part of the superstructure. When the magnetic generators, which they called *degaussers*, were turned on, many sailors and some other military personnel died outright from the stress of the magnetic pulses."

"It's over, Michael; lie down and try to relax. I love you. Please tell me you love me."

"I love you, especially because I now owe you my life!"

"This is something in the basement that we must keep a secret. If the government found out about this, we would be thrown into the loony bin. They would throw away the key to our cells. The military would take it away from us. I know this government. They are power hungry. A few dangerous people have control over this country; and if they got hold of something like this, there is no telling how perverse they could make it."

"I know that I told you how I enjoyed my time serving in the Navy. Now, 'military intelligence' is truly a contradiction in terms. I saw that firsthand, through the eyes of another sailor. I am still in the Navy reserves. They could call me back to serve if a major conflict broke out," Michael explained.

"I don't think I could serve the Navy now. I would have to become a conscientious objector. I can no longer think about helping to kill someone in the name of my country." Michael was angry, almost to the point of being furious.

"Don't go back in there, Michael. I don't like what happened to you. We have a child on the way. What would I do if you didn't survive the next time?" Angela started to cry again, uncontrollably.

Michael held Angela in his arms. "I am so very sorry. I was so busy trying to tell you what happened, I didn't stop to ask if you were okay."

"Honey, I'm okay. Just hold me. I won't tell anyone about what is in the basement." She wiped the tears from her face.

"I have to cover the hole in the wall so no one else ever finds that corridor," Michael spoke with conviction.

"Angela, please don't tell me I can't go back in. I have to return. If you'll feel better, I'll do it with you in the basement; we can tie a rope around me so you can get me out if I wander in too far. I don't like the idea of all those thoughts flooding into my mind. I know there is a great deal more information if I just take it slowly. We could even set up the camcorder and record what is happening. Others may not be able to see what I am seeing, but we can record what you see. We need to anticipate that something else may occur that could be filmed. That way we will have more proof if someone tries to debunk this experience." Michael sounded more passionate than he ever had in the time Angela had known him.

"I'm not going to get any sleep tonight, Angela. There is too much to think about. You need to sleep if you can. I'm supposed to be to work at 7 AM. I have several sick days coming. I'm going to call Frank Wilson and tell him I won't be in to work. He needs another electrician to cover me. If I call Wilson early enough he can find a replacement for me. It's four in the morning, I had better call the plant now and then I'll call Wilson. I'll tell 'em I have the flu and may be off for a couple of days." Michael got his address book out.

"Gayle Hill? This is Mike Simon. I have been sick all day with some kind of intestinal thing. I won't be in today and maybe not tomorrow. I may have to go to Dr. Priestly if the Imodium doesn't work. I'm going to call Wilson so he can get another electrician to cover my shift," Michael said, coughing.

"Hey, I hope you feel better. We just got a big order in. I have to go. I'll leave a note at the personnel office so they don't try to make this an unexcused absence. Maybe I'll see yah out on the golf course sometime." Gayle hung the telephone up.

"That's one down and one to go," Michael commented.

"Frank, sorry to call you so early; this is Michael Simon. I called in sick for today, and I may be out tomorrow. I thought you needed to know in case you had to call another electrician in." He held back a momentary smirk, since he felt like he was playing hooky.

"Well, Angela, that's done. I've got a piece of four-by-eight-foot plywood I can nail to the wall to cover that opening. I'll be right back, sweetheart."

"Promise me you will not step foot in there, Michael." Angela was falling asleep.

"I promise," Michael replied, with his fingers crossed.

When Michael went back into the basement, he began to feel palpitations in his chest. He looked for the plywood to cover the opening in the brick wall. Then he carried the wooden slab into the furnace room and gathered up some masonry nails. He looked at the opening for a moment. It was pulling him. He had great trepidation about going back in there.

"If ever there was a description for hell it's in there," he thought.

Michael could not remember a time when he had felt such consternation. He looked for some rope. He had promised Angela he would not go back in without her being there, but something seemed to be pulling him in. He found a fifty-foot line that he kept for use on his motorboat.

He looked around the room. "I have to cover the basement windows, or someone will look in and see this. I'm not only fearful; now I'm paranoid."

Michael went into his workroom. He took out his tape measure and wrote down the dimensions of the four windows in the basement. Then he slid the plywood into place in front of the corridor's opening and set about making inside shutters for all the windows. The circular saw was loud, but using a handsaw would take too long. He had them made in less than an hour and placed the wooden assemblies into clamps so the Elmer's glue would set correctly. Then he went upstairs and put a pot of coffee on.

"Tess, I better give you an early morning walk, just in case you don't get one later." Michael petted Tess and placed the walking chain onto her collar.

As Michael walked Tess, he kept thinking about Project Rainbow, another name for the Philadelphia Experiment. It made him angry to think his government would do that to their own soldiers and sailors.

He was not the kind of person to dwell on negative things. Nevertheless, *that* step into the lighted corridor had changed him. He was not as carefree as he had been.

Michael felt there was a higher purpose for the corridor than to scare people away. Obviously, someone had built it for the purpose of coming and going.

How long had the corridor been there? Who had built it? It did not look like something humans could have put together. What was causing the walls to be self-illuminating? How was all that information being stored? A hundred questions.

Chapter 12

Michael believed in life on other planets. However, this might be the entrance to life, inside Earth. He remembered that Admiral Richard E. Byrd had flown over the North Pole in 1926 and the South Pole in 1929. It was said officially that Admiral Byrd had found no entrances to Earth's interior. Nevertheless, a lost diary of the admiral was found in the 1970s by the Society for a Complete Earth. In the diary, the admiral wrote that in 1947, while flying over the North Pole, he saw land, blue sky, green vegetation, mountains, and green valleys not shown on any map. The diary described how he had met with beings from the inner realm of Earth. Norse, Tibetan, Egyptian, Eskimo, and South American folklore also told similar stories.

Michael also recalled that Admiral Byrd's son had tried to tell the United States government, and any scientists who would listen, that there was a world that existed inside the planet and that his father had told him all about it.

Like so many other stories, there was no evidence for paleontologists to examine—or pictures, for that matter. So, for nearly forty years, it was put into the paranormal category, along with extraterrestrials, Sasquatch, and ghosts.

At the Earth's Core was a novel or novella written by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Michael had read some of Edgar Rice Burroughs's novels and found some of his fictional ideas plausible.

Darwin's theory of natural selection fit neatly into the textbooks to keep the teaching of the evolution of humankind simple and understandable. However, that did not make it correct.

Michael also knew that sometimes truth was even stranger than fiction.

In 1598, Dutch colonizers spoke of a bird they called a Dodo or silly bird. It was thought to be a myth. Within one hundred years of the Dutch moving to the island of Mauritius, the Dodo became extinct, probably from the animals the Dutch brought with them.

During the time of Christopher Columbus, many Europeans believed Earth was flat. Nowadays, such talk might get you a one-way ticket to a psychiatrist.

Michael placed the wooden covers over the basement windows. He went upstairs to drink some coffee and muster up more courage since he knew he would be entering uncharted territory. He felt perhaps it would be safer if Angela was awake and at the other end of his safety rope when he ventured back into the abyss of that corridor.

Just then, the telephone rang. It was Ian Moralis.

"Michael, this is Ian Moralis from HAZMAT. I understand you will not be at work today, is that correct?" he asked.

"That's affirmative."

"I have some more questions about the incident with Bob Craft."

"Mr. Moralis, I'm not at work. The questions can wait until I return. Why has it taken you so long to complete your inquiry? Never mind; I don't want to know. Any further questioning will have to wait until I return to work." Michael was annoyed as he hung up the telephone. "I can't believe the nerve of that guy."

Michael walked upstairs, sat on the side of the bed, and kissed Angela on the cheek. She was just waking, turned her head, and kissed him.

Angela sat up and asked him to listen for a moment. "I want to tell you a story, so you'll understand what you may really be getting yourself into. It's the story of Pandora's box. Back in the time when Mother Earth was young, the entire human race was as children. No wants or needs were realized. No trouble was on Earth. Epimetheus was given a friend named Pandora. Pandora played like the rest of the children but was smitten with a box that Epimetheus had been given by a wise person named Quicksilver. Weeks and months went by, and Pandora asked Epimetheus to open the box, lest he would never know what was inside. Epimetheus, true to his childlike innocence, had promised Quicksilver he would never open the box. Pandora became unrelenting about the box. Surely, just untying the gold cord that held the top closed would be okay. Pandora lifted the box, kicked the box, even listened to the box for a sound. A single face that had been carved on the top of the box and seemed to watch Pandora as she became more and more determined to open it. Epimetheus became out of sorts as never a child had before, because he seemed to sense something was wrong. Pandora opened the box and let the family of Trouble into the world. Flowers began

to wilt, the children began to age, and Pandora and Epimetheus felt the first pain to enter the world. Trouble had come into the world, and the children would never be the same. Then a voice came from within the box. It was a kind voice. The two children opened the lid to let out a little creature called Hope. Hope touched the children, and the pain went away. Hope promised it would stay on Earth forever."

Angela brushed her beautiful brown hair back as she explained more to Michael: "Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote that story and he seemed to know what he was talking about. I think it's appropriate to think about Pandora before we venture back down to that thing in the basement. You can take the risk of bringing Trouble into our lives; but remember, with Hope, we can get through whatever the consequence."

"How did I get so lucky to have you in my life?" Michael asked.

Angela replied, "Maybe it was planned that way."

"Perhaps," Michael responded. "I made you an omelet with three cheeses and mushrooms in it. I also toasted you a muffin and made some coffee. We have a big adventure ahead of us. I called into work so I could take the next two days off. If someone calls, I have the flu."

"I'll go take a shower. Do you want me downstairs?"

"No, I am going to serve you in bed for once."

Angela asked, "If I shower quickly and come right back, can I wear your cotton pajamas?"

"Of course Angie I'll bring mine up here so we can have breakfast together," he responded.

"That is the first time you have ever called me Angie. I like it," Angela jumped out of bed and turned the shower on.

After breakfast, they made love as if it would be their last time together. Michael took the dishes to the kitchen, and Angela followed him down.

"Sweetheart, I have to check on Cleo and Cheops today—and make sure Marcy Carson has done all the necessary housework, cleaned the pets' areas, and watered my plants."

Michael responded, "Marcy has been doing it daily for nearly a month, Angie. I agree, though, you should check. It'll make yah feel better. Now I'm going to gather the video equipment. I have my camcorder and tripod that I can set up. When I'm ready to enter that corridor, we can turn the camcorder to record mode and put it on auto when I start recording. You can check your house while I get the equipment set up. If we get any calls, let the answering machine get them. We're going to have to make ourselves incognito for this to work."

"I'm already ahead of you on this. I'm going to take notes from my vantage point outside the corridor to corroborate the information from both perspectives, as well as what you can tell me after you exit the corridor."

"What if you slip down the corridor? It looks like it has a decline of about thirty degrees," Angela asked.

"I'm not sure. I have a portable winch; do you think I should rig it so you can turn it on to pull me out if it becomes too much for you?"

"Thank God you asked, Michael. I wasn't sure what I was going to do if you passed out. Do you have any idea how difficult it is to drag someone who is dead weight across a floor? It would be nearly impossible for me to pull you back if you wandered in farther than a few feet." Angela was relieved by the idea.

"The winch has thirty-six feet of line in it. Once I bolt it to the work bench table in the other room, we'll have over twenty feet of line."

Michael held his hand under his chin and thought about all the equipment he had. "I just realized I have my rescue equipment from the volunteer fire department search-and-rescue training. I have a five-point full body harness. We can attach the hook to the D-ring just behind my head. When you turn the winch on, it will pull me out of the corridor headfirst. I'm going to put on my coveralls, military boots, safety goggles, and orange hardhat. You won't recognize me."

"This will take me an hour or two, babe. Can you get all of your errands done and meet me in the furnace room by noon?" Michael began to feel like he was back in the Navy.

"Maybe some green camouflage on my face will finish off the uniform," he thought.

"Yes, and I pray you'll come out of this okay. Please promise me you don't leave my line of sight when you go in, Michael."

"Don't worry, Angie; you're talking to an action hero. However, I always thought Spiderman was more interesting than Superman," Michael said jokingly, although he also had reservations about what he was about to do.

Michael lost sight of the mission for a moment as he went from room to room pulling out his jungle boots with the panama sole, military coveralls, military-issue safety glasses, the rescue harness, old skivvies, and wool socks.

Michael went into the basement, put the winch onto the heavy wooden bench, and bolted it securely. Then he plugged it in and tested the switch. He whistled while he got all of his things together and prepared to dress. He hummed songs and sang some words that he had learned while serving on the *Enterprise*. Then realized Angela might get upset if she heard the words.

"Time to get ready for combat," he anticipated.

As Michael thought about what he had seen and felt from his first entry, an uneasy sense of anxiety started to roll in. He sat down. His heart began racing. He began to perspire. He felt like he had the wind knocked out of him. He ran up the staircase and poured cold water over his head as he fought to breathe. After a few minutes, the initial terror subsided. That was his first full-fledged anxiety attack, but he knew he would be okay. Then he dried his hair and went back into the basement.

"Hell, no! I'm not going to let the anxiety get the better of me. The truth is in there. I have to follow my calling. Right now, that corridor is inferior to my will to survive. I'm the stronger adversary." Michael kept reinforcing his mind to prepare for battle.

The winch was ready. The camcorder was in place and ready to record. Michael had his equipment on, and he met Angela at the back door as she walked in.

"You sure are handsome, Michael. Something about a man in uniform gets me all giddy inside."

"If you had seen me a few minutes ago, you might not be so jovial. But, I love you for your optimism. I just had an anxiety attack. I'm okay now," he said, determined.

"Now, don't get scatterbrained on me, Angela. You're my lifeline. Are you ready to go into the basement and meet this thing head on?" he asked.

"Lock the back door so no one can enter." Michael opened the basement door.

Angela went down the basement steps first. Then Michael came down. He could feel the steps bending slightly from the weight of all his gear. He even had his knife, a compass, and his canteen.

Michael showed Angela how to run the winch as he attached the hook to the back of his harness. He also went over the workings of the camcorder as the winch allowed him to enter the room by letting out more line.

Angela positioned her chair so she could see directly into the corridor and turn the camcorder on.

Michael moved the four-by-eight-foot plywood sheet over to the south wall.

The corridor gave off a self-illuminating iridescent light that seemed to be shimmering with its own life force. Michael knew it really *was* a life force. He kissed Angela and turned the camcorder on. Its little red light pulsed to let him know it was filming.

"I have all of the twenty-some feet of cord from the winch on the floor. All you have to do is go into the next room where the workbench is and push the

switch that causes the rope line to roll up on that spindle,” he told her as he adjusted his gear.

“I understand what I need to do. Please don’t take any unnecessary chances when you go in there, dear. We still want to get married, and I don’t want to be a widow before I marry you.” Angela began to look very anxious again.

Michael took his first step into the corridor. That was as far as he had made it the first time. Now, he walked in two more steps.

“I don’t feel anything yet,” Michael called to Angela, expressing a misleading thought.

Michael did not realize it, but he had already frozen in place again and was not able to move a muscle.

He saw himself inside a camp filled with starving people and felt terrible hunger. Michael could see bodies being dragged along the ground and to a pit. He felt anguish, but mute and numb at the same time. He was dying. Michael could feel his energy fading. Someone was kicking him, telling him to get up. He heard a shot ring out and then felt total freedom. No more pain, no more unhappiness.

Michael was now a child that had been captured. He could see these were primitive people who wore leaves and twisted branches. He was terrified as they began cutting him up alive. They were going to eat him. He was in great pain, felt so alone and defiled. He felt beguilement because he knew his tribe had left him to be caught, so that they might live.

Michael felt the pain of a woman being injected with a drug by a druggist. The druggist raped her because of his power and control over her. The druggist’s greed and pride were moving him to kill the woman. The druggist could not satiate his need for power and control. He was a criminal selling illegal drugs, making the woman’s death look like a suicide with heroin. He looked at her with great disdain and envy at the same time. The man had committed several of the seven deadly sins: pride, envy, anger, avarice, sadness, gluttony and lust. Michael felt great abandonment as this life slipped away.

Michael was now in a one-room apartment lying on a dirty bed; the room smelled. The room seemed grey and depressing. Old food littered the floor. Cockroaches roamed with impunity. He could see himself in a mirror on the wall next to the bed. He looked like a skeleton. Michael knew he had no friends and no family to speak for him. It was difficult to breathe, he had sores all over his body, and they were seeping. He was dying of AIDS. He had received contaminated blood during a blood transfusion and contracted the disease. Everyone he had called a friend believed he had gotten the HIV infection from promiscuous

behavior. Nothing could have been further from the truth. Nevertheless, that did not seem to matter. He was an outcast and lay dying alone in filth.

Angela turned the winch on and pulled Michael out of the corridor. "It happened again. It stopped you dead in your tracks. You didn't get five feet inside the corridor, and you stopped, first stood, then collapsed. We need to stop this, Michael, before you kill yourself."

Michael thought he recognized the voice, "Angela, is that you?"

Michael tore off his helmet and safety glasses and disconnected the braided rope of the winch from his harness.

"I know now, the corridor is telling me something. It is about what humankind is doing to itself and to everything around us." Michael felt disgust.

"That corridor is filled with memories, events that I think the Earth is continuously recording. I'm only seeing part of the big picture. It's being shown to me in single life events. However, the message always seems to be the same. People are destroying people. The animal side of us is an abomination," He shook his head.

"As if that weren't bad enough, I now believe Earth is being affected directly by every negative action that the human race acts out. Earth is treating it like an infection.

"Do you understand what I just said? Earth sees humankind as an infection, and it is becoming sick from that infection. I know there must be other things, but that is what I have seen so far." Michael was awestruck at the awful details.

"Angela, sweetheart, Earth...it is alive! It feels love, hate, birth, death, suffering, happiness, pain. It really feels pain! It acts as if it is sick. The message comes through with every human life event that I become a part of in there. Did you get anything on tape?"

Angela responded. "Michael, all you did was stand motionless for a few moments; then you collapsed. That is when I ran to the other room and turned the winch on and dragged you out of that *entrance into hell*."

"I can do it again. I must do it again. First, I will tell you what lives I became a part of. Then I'm going back in there. If I can just get past the first part of the entrance, I believe a whole world of information will open up to me."

Michael described the lives he had just lived and all the emotions that he felt. Angela wrote the notes down in shorthand, something she had used in college. She felt repulsed by the descriptions.

"Okay, I'm ready to go back in. This time I'm going to walk a distance so that I'm not right in the middle of that nerve center that keeps grabbing me. I'm taking the camcorder in with me. Help me roll the cable on the floor so it will unroll

as I move forward. If you think I am in trouble, just hit the switch and pull the line back in again. I love you. Have faith!" With that, Michael walked back through the entrance.

He walked to the bottom of the corridor that was about twelve feet from the entrance. He could hear a crackling sound, like electricity. He disconnected himself from the cable and walked another twenty feet, following the corridor as it circled first to the right then to the left. Now there were several openings in front of him. He turned the camcorder on and started recording. The walls looked alive. He felt as if he were inside a living, pulsing nerve center.

Now he could see pictures playing on the walls. They displayed in temporal sequence so Michael was able to see events in world history being played out. Some pictures showed the competition to survive among different species of life, including humans.

Other pictures showed humankind's development from using the food and resources in their natural forms, then moving to the implementation of tools.

Michael could see that war and killing were part of the nature of humanity. He watched as people developed technologically. When the technology of writing began, it became another tool that they could use to exploit others.

"So, this was how our development went?" he thought.

Evolved thinking brought about new ways for people to exploit each other and their environment. They did not kill just for survival; they also killed for pleasure.

Hundreds of thousands of years passed before Michael's eyes as he watched similar patterns of behavior. As he had seen when he first entered the corridor, people appeared again and again to self-destruct.

As humans interacted with their environment, the consequences were often catastrophic. Harvesting of materials in moderation seemed to be tolerated by the planet. Nevertheless, just as before, greed and all of the negative behaviors caused people to overuse, to defile, to decimate the planet and its inhabitants.

He watched as weapons were developed and used. The more technologically advanced the weapons became, the more destructive the humans became.

Michael saw people wipe out entire species without giving any thought to their connection to the planet and the rest of life. Greed was at the top of the list of destructive motives. It fueled hate, war, disease, and pestilence.

All of this had a direct effect on the planet. Earth was a living, breathing being. Humans had become a disease to Earth, and it was ready to react violently, preparing to rid itself of this disease.

Now, Michael understood what the corridor was showing him. He knew that Earth was preparing to regain its health, happiness, and abundance of life. It was preparing to destroy humankind. The only other option was that humanity would have to change. From Michael's observation, that appeared extremely unlikely.

Michael walked up the corridor and back into the furnace room in the basement of his house. He removed his helmet, glasses, and harness. As he looked at Angela, he knelt on both knees. Then he got up, covered the opening to the corridor with the plywood, and nailed it to the wall with masonry nails. He knew never before in the existence of humanity was divine intervention so badly needed.

Michael took Angela's hand and walked up to the bedroom where he reached into his dresser drawer and pulled out a book of prayers. He kissed the medal of St. Michael and put the chain around his neck.

"I must pray to God. Constant prayer is required to help human beings—and Earth. Mother Earth is at the brink of a total transformation that will destroy all of humanity. Please forgive me, Angela; I will lose my mind if I believe I have not tried to do my part to help save humankind and reverse the damage done to this beautiful planet."

"I've been shown terrible suffering ahead for all of us. Our species brought this upon ourselves by our disgraceful actions." Michael bowed his head.

Michael kissed Angela's hands and asked her to be patient. He looked into her eyes and said God was the only answer. Then he prayed.

"In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, I pray for the salvation of all of humankind."

"Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give humankind everywhere this day our necessities for life; forgive us for trespassing over this world. Holy father, remove this blight of evil that fills our hearts." Michael's prayer reflected what he had been taught as a child, but he spoke the words as they came to mind.

"Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed are thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Sacred mother, I ask that you intercede between humans and Earth. Help to purify our hearts and remove the evil that has contaminated us."

Michael thought about what Earth had been going through as he prayed. He had believed in God all his life. However, the memory of lives he had lived and the death he had seen afterwards proved the existence of an afterlife. In fact, it had proven several life cycles that humankind went through. Even the world's

memories had shown a spirit that permeated all things. Michael knew there was love in everyone's heart; we just needed to rediscover that love.

The ancient people understood a great deal more about the spirit in things. The life force in everything had always been. It would always be.

But, that didn't change the fact that our current existence on Earth had to change. Humans would be just another footnote in history and become extinct like the dinosaurs if our hearts were not cleansed of the overpowering evil.

Michael had seen that evolution did occur. It occurred in unison with the development of consciousness. The less evolved the species, the less evolved was its consciousness.

Acting like an endless supercomputer, everything that happened in the universe seemed to get recorded. As this memory was kept, the universe increased its creativity and expansion.

Humankind was just a tiny cog in the rotating machinery of physical life. Michael was also amazed at all the life forms that defied description.

Just as there was a positive side to the universe, so there was a negative side. Our current situation had become excessively negative.

Earth had always worked to balance itself. People were forcing Earth's changes. Global warming was occurring too fast for Earth to correct it. The consequence of this would be another Ice Age.

The magnetic field inside and surrounding the planet was reversing. This would bring about a shift in the water levels on the planet. Entire countries would be covered by water. Many coastal cities would exist no more.

The ozone that helped to keep harmful radiation away from the life forms on Earth's surface was nearly gone. Cancers and mutations would bring about more extinction.

Burning huge amounts of fossil fuels had devastated the planet. Huge estuaries that once provided a wealth of plant and sea life were so sick that no life could grow.

Nuclear weapon detonations had the effect of cutting and tearing at the skin of the planet, leaving thousands of gaping wounds that were not healing.

Chemicals that science helped to develop for good had been perverted into weapons. These chemical materials caused dead zones around the planet.

Tsunamis were becoming common as Earth's axis was being shifted. The rotation was like a finely tuned clock. If one wheel did not turn correctly, the entire time piece would fail. So it was with the symmetry of Earth's timepiece.

Armageddon was drawing near. It was not thousands of years away. The time was being counted in only decades or perhaps years.

Michael saw hundreds of prophets come into this existence. They were often met with hate and envy by the self-centered, greedy people who got all their existence through dialectical materialism.

Michael saw that every human being needed to give in to the *mysterium fidei*, the mystery of faith.

Prophets that Michael met included Adam, Buddha, Christ, Mohammad, Moses, Abraham, Sarah, Isaiah, Samuel, Ezekiel, Malachi, Job, Krishna, Oyasama, Nostradamus, Nathan of Gaza, Shirdi Sai Baba, Cottrell, Blavatsky, Deganawidah, Dan Evehema, Mitar Tarabich, John Titor, Richard Rossi, Edgar Cayce, Merlin, St Malachy and others. Some were reincarnations of previous prophets.

God loved humankind unconditionally. However, he had given us free reign over our own destiny in this physical world. Like children who had lost direction, we had confused spirituality with religion.

The great religions of the world were terribly corrupted. Too much of our evil side had taken control of our religious doctrine. God wanted us to understand that each of us had the holiness of God in us. God did not just exist in some unobtainable reality. He was that spark that gave our bodies life. His energy existed within the body. Each of us was truly part of God.

Michael continued to pray: "Archangels of St. Michael, St. Gabriel, and St. Raphael, I pray that you intercede in the name of the father, so that humankind repents for our sins and asks for forgiveness from God, the father almighty."

Michael had seen the levels of spiritual evolvement. Angels did exist. We could ask them to help direct positive energy. Michael also knew that prayer could be directed to departed relatives and friends. Every prayer that was said in earnest added another petal to the rose of love.

The more unconditional the love, the greater one's power became.

However, the more negative people became, the more powerful they could become temporarily. The key here was the word temporary. *Evil never creates. It only destroys.* Sooner or later, it will destroy anything in which it dwells. This is what was destroying people.

The problem confronting Earth right now was that the evil was so bad it was destroying itself and everything around it, including the planet. Yes, evil could destroy entire planets.

Just as there is total light, there is total dark. Michael didn't even want to think about what could exist in total darkness. He suspected it meant a total separation from good and a total separation from God. Many religions had spoken of hell. To be separated from God would be a total hell!

Michael continued to read from the prayer book: "I speak in your name, holy father, each of the following nine salutations in honor of the nine choirs of angels." His lips were dry and chapped. He prayed to St. Gabriel and St. Raphael.

Michael fell to the floor.

Angela helped Michael remove his garments and climb into bed. She could see he had become very ill from what he had endured that day. She, too, prayed silently.

Angela watched over Michael into the night. His temperature had risen to 105 degrees. She understood Michael could not take this fever for very long as seizures might occur. She took a washcloth and wiped Michael's skin down with tepid water. She helped him sip broth and swallow aspirin to fight the fever.

She knew before why she had picked Michael to be her husband and life companion but was fearful at what had taken place. Although Angela had been raised as a Pentecostal, she knew there was power in the rosary. She held it in her hands as she paced the bedroom floor. She picked up the telephone and tried to call the doctor.

"This is Dr. Priestley's answering service. His office is closed. Is this an emergency?" the operator responded to Angela as she tried to call the doctor.

Angela asked, "Can you tell me if someone is taking calls for the doctor tonight?"

"He may still be at home. Let me try calling him there. May I ask what this is about?"

"Tell him Michael Simon is very sick. He has been running a fever of 105 degrees. I have been trying to get him to sip broth. I wiped him down with tepid water to try to cool him. I have only been able to give him two aspirins in the last four hours; the last one I crushed and put into the broth." Angela's lips were quivering.

"Just a moment."

"This is Dr. Priestly. To whom am I speaking?"

"This is Angela Beth. I'm Michael's fiancée. Doctor Priestly, he is very sick. I know it is after hours, but is there anything you can do?"

"I'm just finishing dinner. I know Michael. I will get my bag and be right over. Does he still live at the residence of 150 Halley?"

"Yes, and I will be waiting for you at the front door." Angela hung up the telephone and ran up the Elizabethan-style staircase in the front corridor, into the room where Michael lay. "Sweetheart, I called the doctor. You'll be all right. He's coming over right now."

Michael woke up momentarily and looked at Angela, but his eyes seemed to look right through her.

The doorbell rang and Angela opened the front door to an elderly man in his early sixties. He was neither tall nor short, but the years had given his back an extra bend.

"You must be Angela. I'm Doctor Priestly. I've known this young man since he was six. Michael took his inoculation shots like a little man. I remember that. Did you know he received the Navy Cross when he was in the service? This town has a hero and doesn't even know it. They award the Navy Cross to a person for extraordinary heroism in the face of great danger and at great personal risk to the person. Did he ever tell you about it?" Dr. Priestly asked Angela, as he walked up the steps.

"No, Dr. Priestly, he never said anything about it."

"I'm not surprised. There are a great many things about Michael that people don't know. He's a damn fine citizen, a damn fine citizen." The doctor opened up his bag and took out his blood pressure cuff and stethoscope.

"Where is your telephone?" the doctor asked.

Angela handed the telephone to the doctor. "This is Dr. Priestly in Harborview. I want to talk to Dr. Paul Stevens at Toledo Hospital; can you find him and get him on the line?"

The doctor patted Angela's hand and told her to get her evening coat. Angela walked into the other room.

"Paul, is that you? Listen, I am going to call an ambulance and send a young man I know to be admitted to your hospital. His name is Michael Simon. It looks like he has some radiation burns on his hands and forearms. He has a high fever. His vital signs are stable, but he is dehydrated. Will you see he is admitted to the ICU for me? Yes, of course, and you the same. Take care. I'll be in touch." Dr. Priestly hung up but immediately dialed again.

"This is Dr. Priestly. I need an ambulance at 150 Halley Street. It's Michael Simon. He appears stable, but when you get here I want you to start some lactated ringers. Do not use Dextron. Okay, thanks. Goodbye." The doctor walked into the hallway where Angela stood.

"If I didn't know better, I'd say your fiancé has radiation burns on his hands. He may have been exposed to something caustic or radioactive. How is that possible? Do you have any idea what Michael has been doing over the last twenty-four hours?" The doctor asked.

Angela shook her head. "No, doctor, I don't know what could have caused it."

"I put some sterile gauze over his hands. Tell the ambulance personnel to leave it there; it can be replaced when he gets to Toledo Hospital." Dr. Priestly had a reassuring smile.

"I'll stay until the ambulance gets here if I can. I used to make house calls like this into the early 1960s. However, times have changed, and things just aren't done this way anymore. I wanted Michael to go into medicine. He always seemed to have the knack for calculations and not being squeamish. He helped me in my office for a short time just before he went into the Navy. I always thought he would have made a good doctor, good manners and all."

"Well, enough of this. They are here. I'm glad to have made your acquaintance, Angela. I'm sorry I forgot to ask. Have you two set a wedding date?" Dr. Priestly seemed like an honest man.

Angela was a little embarrassed about the question since she was pregnant. "No, not yet. But we have our rings."

"I will be disappointed if I do not get an invitation. I'd bet half this town would come if Michael asked them. We will talk again. Goodbye now." The doctor walked to his car as the paramedics did a two-man lift and carried Michael down to the gurney waiting outside the front door.

Angela waved to the doctor and went back inside as the ambulance pulled away. She did not know many people in Harborview and would probably have to drive up to the hospital by herself. She looked through the address book that she and Michael had.

"Oh, I have to call Lenny," She thought.

"Lenny, this is Angela. Michael got sick, and they are taking him up to Toledo Hospital. Dr. Priestly came to the house when I called him. He called an ambulance for me." Angela held back the tears.

"Is he okay? Is he hurt? Is it serious? Dr. Priestly never makes house calls!" Lenny seemed beside himself.

"He looked okay, just exhausted I think," Angela replied.

"I'm going up there. Do you want to ride with me?" Lenny asked.

"Yes, I would appreciate that. What about Linda?" Angela remarked.

"No, I'm going to tell her only what I have to. I don't want her to get sick too. I'll be there in ten minutes or less," Lenny replied.

There was a knock at the front door. It was Dan Sexton. "My dad called me when he saw it was Michael in the ambulance. Where are they taking him?"

"Toledo Hospital," Angela replied.

"I'm sorry. Are you okay? Do you need a ride up there?" Dan asked.

Angela responded as Dan walked in: "No, I have a ride up there, thank you."

Lenny ran up the front steps and into the front door.

"Hey, man, did you hear about Mike?" Dan asked Lenny.

"Yeah, I'm taking Angela up to Toledo Hospital. I just told Linda the bare minimum to get out of the house, so don't tell her about Michael," Lenny requested of Dan.

"I'm calling some of the guys. They need to know. We need to go up there and cheer Mike up," Dan responded.

Lenny laughed. "It's been a long time since the whole gang was together."

"I'm sorry, Angela. I'm not laughing at you or Mike. It's just we had a lot of good times growing up, and it seems like everyone has just gone their separate ways," Lenny explained.

Angela understood. "Friends need to keep in touch with one another. It is a lonesome world without friends. Did you know Michael and I are engaged? We have not set a date yet, but I want all of you to be there for the wedding. Michael means the world to me, and he speaks often of the friends he had growing up in Harborview. You two are at the top of the list."

"Okay, I'll meet you up there," Dan replied as he walked down the front steps and towards his parents' residence.

"Lenny, is it okay if I call Jen Greer and her brother Al and ask them if they want to go?"

Lenny was a sincere friend. He responded, "Certainly. Al Greer is one of my buddies."

Angela called Jen and told her that Michael had been taken to Toledo Hospital. She asked if she and her brother, Al, would ride up to the hospital with them. She told Jen that Lenny was driving and that was why she thought Al might like to come along.

Jen told Angela to have Lenny pick them up at their residence on Birch Street. Al got in the front seat with Lenny, and Jen sat in back with Angela. Many questions were asked about Michael's condition, but Angela acted as if she did not have any answers. She remembered Michael told her to keep everything secret, so she did.

Lenny scratched his head. "We're here. I hope they have a lot of room for visitors. It is a big hospital. There must be over seven hundred beds here. Look at the size of this place."

The four of them walked through the main entrance since it was still before 11 PM and a security guard was there. Angela kept rolling her engagement ring around and around on her finger as she and Jen walked to the elevators toward the ICU.

"I envy Michael sometimes. It sounds silly to say that. But, he has a lot of people that really care about him," Angela spoke in a slightly timid tone.

The nurses in ICU seemed agitated at the crowd as Angela walked to the nurses' station to ask if she could see Michael for a few minutes. The others tried to find seats.

"Friend or family?" the nurse asked.

Angela responded, "I am his fiancée."

The nurse spoke in a stern voice: "Okay, but the waiting room is full of people waiting to see your fiancé, and we stop letting visitors in after 9 PM. I will make this an exception. Nevertheless, I'm going to have to tell the other visitors that he needs to get some sleep."

"Michael, I'm here. I love you so much. I said a prayer for you when the ambulance took you away. You really had me scared. I didn't say anything about your hands. Are you feeling better?" Angela looked at Michael with her angel eyes.

Michael reached over to touch Angela. His arms were covered in gauze all the way up to his biceps, "I miss being with you the most, sweetheart. You are all I thought about. I'm okay. Dr. Priestly just overreacted and sent me here."

Angela kissed Michael. "No, Michael, you're wrong. You were sick. I cannot lose you. Our baby needs her daddy."

The nurse came in and said, "I'm sorry; you'll have to go now. We have some more tests to do, and he needs his rest. Once he leaves the unit, you might be able to stay with him. They can bring a cushioned chair for you to sit on in the step-down unit."

"Michael, you'll be in my dreams. I'll be back to see you tomorrow. I'll write you a letter and put something personal in it to make you want to get well faster. I'm all yours, and I will be forever." She rose up on her tiptoes, kissed and hugged Michael.

Angela walked out into the waiting room where eleven people were bunched together.

"The nurse said we have to leave now. Visiting hours were only until nine. She was nice, but she said we need to leave quietly and come back tomorrow," Angela said as she looked at all the faces and realized how important Michael was to his friends.

"Did anyone call Michael's parents?" Susie Trip asked.

"Let's wait until tomorrow. If we call them tonight, they'll just worry all night," Al said.

Lenny spoke up, "I better call them, or my butt will be in a sling."

"Don't tell them about the engagement, Lenny. I haven't had a chance to call them yet," Angela responded.

Everyone filed out of the waiting room. Several suggested that they meet when they got back to Harborview. The ride back was relaxing for Angela; she sat quietly and slept in short intervals. Memorial Park was the intended meeting place. When Lenny got there, over twenty people were sitting near or on the park benches by the concession stand.

"Who wants a hamburger? I'll take the lock off this window latch, and we can eat some snacks with our beer," Rob Crumbley suggested to the gathering crowd.

"Hell, we need some light, and that street light doesn't cut it." As quickly as he stopped speaking, Rob had opened the concession stand and turned on the inside light.

"Now, just what do you think you're doing?" Police Chief Blayne said as he walked toward the food stand.

"Chief Blayne, we heard your wife retired ya. Nobody is making any trouble. We just needed some light. We were going to cover what we used by putting money in the till. Yah know. This money tray that is empty at the moment," Rob replied.

"Put everything back like you found it when you're done, and I'll forget I saw this."

"Got time for a brewski, Chief?" Someone laughed.

"Okay, smartass, who said that?"

Dan spoke out: "Honestly, Bill, you must have heard Michael Simon got hurt! We just need a spot to cool down after going to Toledo to see if he was going to survive. Don't take the comment personal. We like you as our police chief. Otherwise, you would have been tarred and feathered years ago when your brother was causing problems in town."

"I'll be back here in an hour. Everyone needs to be gone so I can tell the town council I'm doing the job," the chief replied as he put his nightstick in the car and drove away.

"He doesn't do too badly considering his IQ." Several people laughed.

The conversations continued for another half an hour before everyone left. Angela was dropped off at the house. She unlocked the door. Tess was up and wagging her tail.

Chapter 13

“Michael is a dog person. That is for sure. He sure loves you, Tess. Come on, girl, let’s go out in the yard, and then I have to get some sleep.” Angela hugged Tess around the neck. She never thought she could love a dog the way she loved Michael’s dog, Tess.

“Now I just have to figure out how you and Cleo can learn to live in the same house.”

Angela walked up the stairs and into the bedroom. The answering machine was lit up like a Christmas tree. She took out a tablet and pencil and hit the answer button. Person after person called and asked about Michael. Some of the people said they were Navy friends. Others were women who sounded more concerned than Angela cared to hear. When the machine stopped, over forty calls had been logged. Angela fell backwards onto the bed.

“He could have been the president if he had been a politician,” Angela thought to herself.

“Thank God he isn’t like that.” She smiled as she pulled the quilt over herself.

Angela was asleep before Tess had settled on her dog mattress. Angela slept so soundly that even telephone calls during the night did not wake her. She woke up Wednesday morning around eleven and could not remember the last time she had slept that long. Angela could not wait for Michael to return home.

Nevertheless, she knew the time was fast approaching when she would have to sit Michael down and tell him things he might not want to hear. Angela showered, then ate some yogurt. She walked Tess around the block and went to her house to give some TLC to Cleo and Cheops. They had not received any

one-on-one attention from Angela in days. It was July 1, 1985, and Angela was determined to tell Michael within the week how and why they had come together. The Wise Ones had chosen Michael to try to turn the hearts of humankind.

Angela knew the timeline was fast approaching when it would be too late. Mother Earth was preparing to get rid of the pestilence as it had in several previous Earth cycles. Angela knew some would be saved by going underground. The Gregorian calendar was moving humankind closer to doomsday, if drastic change did not occur.

Michael was sent home on July 3 and spent his day resting and having Angela send out thank-you cards to all the people who had showed their concern for his recovery.

"You know what day tomorrow is, Angela?"

"Independence Day, with fireworks, picnics, family, and friends giving thanks for our independence as Americans. It is my day to appreciate and love you with all that I am," Angela replied.

Michael remarked, "My love for you just keeps growing. But, you and I have a responsibility to try to help people put things right. People can take sides on creationism or evolution. It makes no difference. What matters is that we must understand they hold the keys to their own destiny and the destiny of this wonderful planet. I saw what humanity had done, and I am ashamed for all of us. I have been given a message, a gift."

Michael added, "Earth bore her soul to me, and I may not be able to fix it; but I have to try. You came to me to be at my side for this. I understand it now. I know your secret. Earth spoke and I listened. Your people came from a time before humanity's beginning, Earth showed me that. Thank God, I have you to keep me sane through all of what I must try to do."

Earth will rise up in pain, and the entire world will be made barren. A new cycle will begin again. Humankind is the disease and a destroying force. Nothing happens purely by chance. Everything is for a reason. When I was in that corridor, God spoke to me. It was not because of my upbringing; he gave me the answers from within my own belief system. I was closer to the truth than I realized. Mother Earth spoke as the giver of life, with such profound portent. There are a thousand or more names for God. Most of all, God is unconditional love. Humanity has been blind to the simplest truth of all: love one another. Love is the glue that binds everything together. Tomorrow is 'Independence Day,' all right!"

"Let's make tomorrow the best day of our lives, Michael. We can just enjoy the company of friends and attend the activities at the park for the Independence Day celebration." Angela took a cool washcloth and wiped Michael's eyes.

"Angela, I wanted a big church wedding for us. You deserve a beautiful ceremony and something that you can remember when you are old and grey. However, now I want to ask you something."

Michael looked at her with sincerity. "Sweetheart, if we can work it out with the celebration committee, I want to take a few minutes on the platform to get married. It will be in front of all the people that are coming to the park for festivities and the fireworks."

"Who would we find in town to marry us on such short notice?" Angela wondered.

"I know several people who might be available. Even the municipal judge or Chief Blayne has the ability to do it," Michael continued.

"Michael, I would feel better if we found a priest or a minister if you really want to do this."

"I want to do it, Angela. I don't want to wait. There is no way for me to tell what the near future has in store for us."

Michael got on one knee, took Angela's right hand into his, and said, "Please marry me in front of all the people in Harborview. I would be the proudest man on the planet to have you for my wife. Our wedding date would have been set already if I had not started messing with something that nearly killed me. Will you marry me tomorrow?"

"Yes, I will marry you tomorrow. I want to be with you forever." Angela's eyes sparkled.

"Get my address book out. We need to make some calls."

Michael and Angela began to call members of the city council and the town mayor to ask for short use of the activities platform. After an hour of tedious and intensive negotiating, Michael got his wish. They would be able to use the wooden band platform at 5 PM to exchange vows of matrimony. The mayor asked if he could also speak in Michael's behalf. Michael was honored by the mayor's request. Even though so many people had called out of concern during his illness, Michael still could not grasp that people in the town cared so much about him. He didn't think he was anyone important.

"Now we have to find a minister to officiate. I need a best man, and you need a maid of honor. Can you think of who you want to be your maid of honor?" Michael asked.

"You know, I have butterflies in my tummy right now, Michael," Angela spoke in an excited voice.

Angela was not given to acting so capriciously. She thought about how much she loved her parents and wished they could be there. Her sister, Sharon, was not in the state, so she could not be the maid of honor. Maybe, Vicki Pickford would do it if she were available.

Angela had met several women in the community, especially after Michael got hurt. However, she had been talking to Vicki over the last few weeks and really liked her. She knew that Vicki had attended catechism at the same time as Michael. Angela also knew that Michael had a huge crush on Vicki. She and Vicki had spoken about Michael. Vicki had told Angela how Michael said he wanted to marry her. Angela was not jealous. She trusted Michael. Furthermore, she knew Vicki was a good person.

"I want to ask Vicki Pickford to be my maid of honor. Is that okay with you?" Angela asked, running her hand through Michael's wavy hair.

"Of course it is! I'm asking Lenny to be my best man. I hope he's not working then. It would hurt his feelings if I asked someone else first. He's my best friend, after all."

"Vicki? This is Angela Beth. Are you busy tomorrow afternoon around five?"

"Just some errands before I go to the fireworks. Is Michael sick or something?" Vicki inquired.

"Michael is better. He wants to marry me tomorrow at five down at Memorial Park. I wondered if you'd be gracious enough to be my maid of honor. I know it's really short notice and all."

"I'm really flattered and honored at the same time. Of course, I'll be at your side when you marry Michael. I would do it in the middle of a blizzard."

"Don't say that, Vicki. We don't want some catastrophe to happen."

Vicki laughed. "I'm sorry. I need to watch what I say."

"I don't think that at all. Michael will be flattered to have two women that he desperately loves standing next to him at his wedding. I'll share him with you, Vicki, but just for the ceremony," Angela giggled. She knew that was one of Michael's fantasies.

"I'll be wearing a single-piece dress that goes nearly to my ankles. Do you have a dress like that, Vicki?" Angela commented as she thought about the flowers and the little extras.

"I think I can find a matching dress. Do you want me to meet you at your house at four, and we'll just go there together?" Vicki inquired.

"That would be perfect. You really are as nice as Michael said you were. I will talk to you later. Call me if you have any ideas about the bouquet, Vicki. Bye now." Angela handed the phone to Michael.

"You better try to reach Lenny now. I have several ideas. I'm going to have to sit down and decide on some things. Better hurry Michael. We still have to find a preacher."

"I know," Michael responded.

"Linda, is Lenny home from work yet?"

"Hi, Michael, I'm so glad you are back home. I was worried sick when I heard you got hurt. Lenny did not tell me until the day you were coming home. I was so mad at him. He is still in the doghouse with me for doing that," she responded.

"Be easy on him. He was just trying to keep from getting you upset. When you went to the emergency room about a month ago, he was a lot more worried about you than you might have thought," Michael interjected.

"Maybe what you say is true. But, he doesn't have the right to keep things like that from me. Sometimes he doesn't act like he loves me. I swear he'll never grow up. Here he is. Bye, Michael." Linda handed the telephone to Lenny.

"Lenny? We have been friends for a long time. I have a special favor to ask you."

"It sounds like trouble. You want to go to a strip joint in Toledo to take your mind off your hands?" Lenny was in another ornery mood.

"It's nothing like that, Lenny. I want you to be my best man tomorrow afternoon at five. Are you available?" Michael asked.

"I'm not single, but I am available to the right lady," Lenny smirked.

Michael was not sure whose attitude was worse sometimes: Lenny's or Linda's. But, Lenny had been his best friend for years. He'd always been there when Michael needed help.

"Hey, you know I will. You're my best bud. Who is the maid of honor going to be? Don't I get to kiss the maid of honor? That's part of the deal, isn't it?" Lenny was quick on his toes tonight.

"Guess. I'll give you three tries before I tell you." Michael was grinning.

"Well, if I was to pick her, it would be Jenny Hayden."

"That's one down and two to go," Michael said, laughing.

"I better get serious. Hmm, there aren't a lot of women as cute as your fiancée, and you wouldn't have a troll accompany her, so I've got to say Cindy Minier, right?" Lenny was acting impatient to get the answer.

"Two down and one to go!" Michael liked teasing Lenny like this.

"This isn't fair. Give me a hint. At least tell me her initials. You wouldn't want your best man to stroll down the aisle behind you with Frankenstein's daughter, would you? Wait, I know who it is. Patty Appleton is the maid of honor; and when the wedding is over, she and Angela are going to have a cat fight over you." Lenny was laughing hysterically and coughing at the same time.

"You need to stop smoking, Lenny. It's gonna kill yah. Then I won't have you to complain to," Michael remarked. "Besides, no one could replace your incorrigible spirit."

"Look at it this way, Mike. If I smoke, that's one less kid out there that will be able to get his hands on my cigarette."

"That's sure a weird analogy. How can you make comparisons like that when you know the cigarette manufactures will just crank out more cigarettes?" Michael hooted at Lenny's strange sense of humor.

"I'm going to call in sick to work. I was scheduled to work on the fourth. That is un-American, for them to try to do that to me. So, you just helped me make up my mind. I am sick. I feel my head hurting already." Lenny was a character.

"You have to be here at the house by four. Then we will go down there together. By the way, the maid of honor is Vicki Pickford." Michael waited for Lenny to say something.

"Since this is an unconventional wedding, can we take the gals parking afterwards? I want to die on the fourth of July. I want it to happen while I'm having sex with Vicki. Please, Michael, say yes. I won't tell my wife, if you don't."

"Somehow, Lenny, I believe you." Michael bumped his hand against the telephone. "Ouch. Damn!"

"You got me laughing so hard I hit the burn on my hand against the telephone receiver. Now I have to find a preacher. Do you have any ideas, Lenny?"

"Yeah, marry yourself. You enjoy preaching to me so much. You can just play the part of the preacher, too," Lenny replied.

"Are you diabetic, Lenny? Because you are acting like you have hypoglycemia. You better not be this goofy tomorrow during the wedding ceremony."

"I'll make a truce until after we leave the stage. After that, I'm going to chase Vicki around the park." Lenny laughed incessantly.

"I already told your wife about the marriage ceremony. She will be sitting in the bleachers watching your every move," Michael responded.

"There is a word for people like you, Michael: traitor!" Lenny grumbled.

"I'm just yanking your chain, Lenny. I don't know if Linda will be there or not. But, this town is too small for you to act as if we are still in high school. Linda would find out in twenty-four hours or less if you tried to boink another

woman. You'd be paying child support up the ying yang, and I'd probably have to build you a doghouse in the side yard since she would take all your paychecks."

Lenny remarked, "Hell, she does that now. Don't ever let a woman control your money. They will nag you to death and then collect on a large life insurance policy."

"The way things are going in this world right now, nobody will need to worry about life insurance because there won't be anyone around to pay out." Michael thought about what he had just said and wondered if maybe he had said too much.

"Yeah, I hear yah, partner. I know who you can call that is a preacher. He is a part-time ghostbuster and preacher to the pigeons on the roof over at St. Anthony's. They turned him down for that *Friday the 13th* flick. Oh, I'm sorry, that's the priest at your church I was just talking about," Lenny quipped.

"Lenny, you are hysterical. Let's be serious!"

"What about Reverend Greer? He's a good person. Besides, he's Al's ol' man."

"Yeah, he'd be perfect if it's not too late to ask him. I'll see you tomorrow, Lenny. Bye."

Things were falling into place. It seemed almost like the wedding was preordained.

"Is Reverend Greer there? This is Michael Simon. Hello, Reverend. I need your help."

"What is it, Michael?"

"I am going to marry my fiancée, Angela Beth, tomorrow at Memorial Park. Would you do me the honor of officiating at the wedding?" Michael crossed his fingers.

"Michael, I have to be done by 7 PM. I am counseling someone that evening."

"Reverend Greer, you're a lifesaver. Tell Al to be there, please."

"Why are you getting married on such short notice, Michael?" Reverend Greer asked.

"I love my fiancée. I can't live in sin anymore, Reverend. Besides, I like the idea of seeing fireworks go off right after I say I do. Thank you so much, Reverend Greer. It is scheduled for five on the entertainment stage." Michael felt a rush of relief.

"Angela, we're getting married tomorrow. I got everyone I need to attend. Reverend Greer is even going to try to get the marriage certificate ready tonight so we can sign it tomorrow. Honey, I am so happy. I wish you had come into my life sooner. You really do make me want to be a better man. I feel really special,

like God made this all come together without a hitch," Michael could hardly contain his excitement.

"Angela, I need to make love to you. I don't mean to sound insensitive. But it has been, like, three days since we did it. I get sick inside when I can't bond with you daily."

"Let me shut the curtains. I'm aroused already, and I haven't even unbuckled my summer shorts." She slid under the top sheet, and Michael nearly wept, he had such intense feelings for her.

It was getting dark outside, and the window was open. The crickets chirped so loudly they seemed to be in the room.

Angela could be a screamer sometimes, and this was one of those times. She even scared Tess out of the room. Michael didn't talk much during lovemaking sessions, but he was like a wild animal.

"If the cats outside had a shoe, they would have thrown it against our screen window," he said. They both laughed. "You are unbelievable, Angela."

"Are you happy, Angie?"

"I'm happy and with the man of my dreams. Please don't let this moment end. I wish your hands were feeling better so you could rub that strawberry-flavored lotion all over my body. Then you could lick it off. I'm glad another woman didn't hunt you down and take you before I got you."

"This is the last day I will be a single man. Please grant me a wish."

"And what is that?" Angela asked, with a smirk on her face.

"Stay with me forever."

"Granted."

"Now, be my slave for the rest of the night, and I'll let you live another day." Angela was sensual along with being a natural beauty. In her mind, she was Cleopatra with Mark Antony.

After a few hours had passed, Angela and Michael showered together and held hands going down the front steps to get a late-night snack from the kitchen.

"Sometimes you can see a UFO bouncing around in the sky at night here. It's quiet outside. Let's take this blanket out in the yard." Michael kissed Angela's hand while he held it.

"I have a flashlight; if you see anything moving funny in the sky, let me know. I'll flash the light at it. Hey, we have something coming toward us from the north. Do you see it?" he asked.

"Yes, it's bright. Do you think it's a satellite?" she remarked.

"Not sure. It might be. Let me try some Morse code."

Michael started to flash the object with the flashlight. It was dark outside as there were no streetlights near the house. Angela's house was adjacent, and nearly all the lights were turned off. Michael's house only had a small light on under the stove ventilation hood. He teased Angela that the grey aliens might be coming over, looking for a human to gobble up. Then the object stopped in the air. Michael looked over at Angela. He realized that the object had descended and was getting larger. It was a translucent, whitish-blue, glowing object, and details were easy to discern.

"Angela, are you scared?" Michael asked.

"No, I know what it is," Angela replied.

"What do you mean you know what it is?"

"This has the same design as the craft I saw George Adamsky talk about in his books. I see windows where the circumference gets larger. It's going to land."

Angela and Michael both stood up. The craft landed in the field behind the house. There was no noise except for a high-pitched sound that was nearly outside the range of human hearing. A strobe on the top of the craft flashed so fast Michael had trouble looking at it.

"They want us to go to the craft," Angela said.

Without another word between them, they walked to the unidentified aircraft. A portal opened, and three humanoid beings stood looking at them.

"They want us to come into the craft. Can you hear them? They're speaking telepathically. They said their craft has a cloaking device that limits the light being emitted from their craft. It breaks up the light and refracts so that only we can see them. Michael, these are the beings that I share some of my DNA with. They are guardians of this planet. Their intentions are good."

"I understand what they are saying. They are going to protect us from people who might try to stop us from bringing peace to the planet. They understand everything I saw in the corridor. There is an endless supply of knowledge that they can share with us along with what information the corridor contains. They built the corridor coming from within Earth and to the point behind my basement wall." Michael was amazed at the new world that been opened to him.

"Yes, they know I love you with all my heart. They know we have a baby on the way. They are the light keepers."

"This is my extended family, Michael." Angela went up to one of the beings and put her first two fingers against his, a form of greeting to these people.

"Most light keepers come here from the Pleiadian constellation. There are over three thousand planets within this galaxy. The Pleiadias is a small cluster of stars located four hundred light years from Earth. They know you are an enlight-

ened being. That's why they brought us together. You emulate light as they do because you are filled with love for all of God's creation." Angela's smile ran cheek to cheek.

"There are thirty-six different types of extraterrestrials that have taken an interest in the planet Earth. The ones they call the grey are negative beings and dangerous to us and to all life on Earth. The Pleiadians will return again, soon. You will know their names as Quetzelos, SFathq, and Jaseseme."

"They are going to watch the wedding tomorrow, Michael. So, I will have family there after all."

"Go with love, Jaseseme." Angela touched the female's fingertips and exited the aerial craft.

Michael and Angela went back into the house. They both went to the bedroom to lie down. Angela squeezed Michael's hand. She felt overwhelmed that her people had dropped in to give their blessing to the wedding.

"I was going to tell you all these things, Michael, but you found most of it out on your own. Jaseseme told me that we would no longer become ill or get frightened when we enter the corridor. However, she warned against bringing anyone else in. A normal human being cannot take the electromagnetic energy that emanates from the chambers. You received some radiation during your journey. You are conditioned now and won't react negatively to the energy," Angela explained.

"Look at your hands, Michael," Angela pointed to where the burns were.

"The damage is gone. They healed me!" Michael was shocked and amazed.

"Michael, you healed it. They were just a conduit. It was your positive energy that healed the burns." Angela snuggled up to Michael and they slept until 10 AM.

The telephone rang. It was Lenny. "Getting cold feet yet, Michael? At least try to last until after I kiss Vicki Pickford."

Lenny was in his usual jovial spirit, a part of Lenny that Michael appreciated. He was just fun to be around. He was loyal and had always been consistent about his concern for other people. Michael felt he learned this kindness in part from having grown up without a father.

"Does Linda know you are helping in the wedding?" Michael inquired.

"Yeah, she is actually baking cookies and some other dishes to put out on the picnic tables for anyone to eat after you take your marriage vows. Several people in town are out shopping right now for you and Angela. I'm not supposed to tell you any of this. But, what are friends for?" Lenny said it like the jokester that he was.

The day went by too quickly. It seemed like so many things needed to be done. Then, before anyone could see it coming, the clock rang four. Lenny and Vicki had arrived, as had several other people from town. Even Dr. Priestly stopped by to drop off a gift and kiss the bride-to-be.

"The house is open to whoever wishes to stay here. Donna Brackman was nice enough to come over and put up decorations. Donna, thanks, you're wonderful. Angela and I need to leave and get to Memorial Park, so if you need anything, ask Donna.

"Angela and I will see all of you later. Thanks, everyone, for making this the most wonderful day of my life. If the rest of the world was like the people in this community, there would be no wars." Michael still wanted to hold onto his naïve faith about humanity.

Michael took Angela to the SUV and helped her in. She had received a white wedding gown from an unknown source and looked like a queen in royal attire.

Michael realized that the park was nearly full of people. It was only fifteen minutes after four in the afternoon. He was flabbergasted that so many people had showed up at the park. It looked like half of the town's population

"Angela, hold me up if I faint. You need to keep an eye on Lenny, too. He wants to grab Vicki. Reverend Greer is up there waiting for us. So is Chief Blayne. What has he got up his sleeve, handcuffs?" Michael smiled and looked at all the faces he recognized.

"You stand over here, and Lenny you're there"; Preacher Greer finally got a chance to put everyone in their place.

"Dear friends and family, with great affection for Michael Simon and Angela Beth, we have gathered together to witness and bless their union in marriage. To this sacred moment, they bring the fullness of their hearts as a treasure and a gift from God to share with one another. They bring the dreams, which bind them together in an eternal commitment. They bring their gifts and talents, their unique personalities and spirits, which God will unite together into one being as they build their life together. We rejoice with them in thankfulness to the Lord for creating this union of hearts, built on friendship, respect, and love," Preacher Greer paused to give Michael and Angela the traditional Catholic wafer and wine as an offering of the sacrament of communion. They each took the offering and bowed their heads in prayer.

Michael turned to Angela and said, "I, Michael Simon take you, Angela Beth, to be my wife. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you and never forsake you all the days of my life."

Angela then said to Michael, "I, Angela Beth, take you, Michael Simon, to be my husband. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you and never forsake you all the days of my life."

"Angela, take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Michael recited his words correctly.

"Michael, take this ring." Angela spoke softly.

Angela surprised Michael when she sang the words of *You Are the Love of My Life* with the band giving the musical accompaniment.

"You may now kiss the bride," Reverend Greer said, as he completed the ceremony.

As quickly as the ceremony began, it ended. What shocked Michael was that when he turned with Angela in hand, over one hundred people stood up, clapped and cheered. He didn't think that many people even knew who he was.

Michael and Angela stayed at the park for about an hour saying hello to old acquaintances. They received dozens of gifts. There were so many gifts that Michael, Vicki, and Lenny all had to fill their vehicles before leaving. Michael wondered if the community was expecting a speech.

Angela had acted ingratiating, and Michael felt extremely proud. They arrived back at Michael's house only to find that, indeed, the party had continued.

"Everyone, please do me a favor. If you have had too much to drink, ask me, or one of the other hosts, and we will drive you home. I don't want to see anyone get hurt because they left here intoxicated." Michael had seen enough death come from drunk driving.

"Donna, thank you, again, for hosting this wedding party. Will you call the cab company and find out if we can hire a driver until 3 AM, just to cover intoxicated people who are here?" Michael asked.

"I think that is one of the smartest ideas I have heard in a long time," Donna replied.

"Michael, the cab company doesn't have the staff to do that, but they contacted Jack Kolbjør. He said for a hundred dollars, plus gas money, he would make himself available for the night," Donna replied.

"Then Jack has a job for tonight. Have him come over. But he is not allowed to drink any alcohol." Michael thanked Donna Brackman and went to find Angela.

"What have you been doing, sweetheart?" Michael inquired.

“I met all those people tonight. Everyone really likes you. You’re the talk of the town. You really have a wonderful life, Michael.” Angela was happy to be part of the community.

The party went on, well into the night. After the last guest left, Michael locked the front door and went to bed. It was four o’clock Friday morning, July 5, 1985.

Chapter 14

Angela was asleep, and although Michael wanted to make love to her, he decided to fluff his pillows, sit back, and think about what had happened to him in the more recent part of his life.

Michael also thought back to times when playing baseball all day in the field behind the house was the cool thing to do. As a child, he became more inquisitive about what made things tick. Bugs were interesting. He had collected butterflies for a few years and learned how to collect bugs with nets and how to set traps. Once he had a specimen that was not in his collection, and he used acetone to preserve the color. Then he spread its wings and put a pin through it for display. When he used the butterfly net, he wondered if the dragonfly might try to avoid the net if the color was white instead of green.

Then he thought about what the Pleiadians had said: "There are thirty-six species of extraterrestrials that are taking interest in Earth, and many are negative beings."

What kinds of things have these malevolent beings been doing to humans? How many formaldehyde bottles containing humans were floating around in the universe? The thought made him cringe with contempt.

Growing up, he never had a second thought about the wild game he hunted. Now he thought he understood better what it was like being the hunted.

He now had the task to change human behavior. Destruction of the planet would have to stop, or Earth was going to squash humanity like a bug in a collection. Humanity was on the serving platter for these highly evolved creatures, too.

Who knows what kind of manipulation was coming from other species that might be contributing to our destructive behavior? Divide and conquer. Michael had heard that phrase used to describe war tactics.

Did extraterrestrials and inner terrestrials do the breeding, growing, then butchering of humans? It was very plausible if one were to follow the survival of the fittest theory.

People were bad enough without outside interference. Michael needed to focus on dealing just with issues among human beings. The probability that a higher intelligence was preying upon humans made sense. Microbes had been killing huge numbers of human beings throughout history. Furthermore, it was only recently that humankind realized that microscopic organisms even existed.

Now, Michael began to see why governments around the world had chosen not to speak of advanced life forms, extraterrestrials, inner terrestrials, beings from other dimensions, and all of the possibilities that exist based on the laws of physics. This really would fracture the very foundation on which humanity's emotional existence hinged.

Michael stood and walked downstairs. It was becoming daylight, and he felt a great sense of dread come over him.

"We are not even close to being in control of our lives. How does anyone think I can change people? In light of the fact that all these other intellectually advanced life forms are fooling around on Earth, I am having doubts about my own religious beliefs." Michael sipped slowly out of the glass of water he held in his hand.

"This is going to take more than I have to offer. I never thought of myself as a hero when they pinned that medal on me in the Navy. It's too much to swallow." Michael put down the glass and went back to the bedroom.

Michael laid his head down on the pillow and fell fast asleep. He was transported back to a time when people roamed Earth as primitive beings and became one of them. He looked on as children played and adults set about the task of living day to day without the slightest inkling of what the next day might bring. They defecated where they stood, like fatted cattle, and continued foraging for food or fornicating. He saw this as another terrible nightmare. He shook his head back and forth and was able somehow to wake himself up. This was a trick he had learned as a boy. However, he couldn't remember the last time he had awakened himself out of a dream like that.

When Michael first woke, he thought about his insightful dream. Then his thinking went to Jesus, who spoke to the people and said, "I am the light of the

world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." Michael was convinced that Jesus had been a physical manifestation of God.

Michael thought about Jesus saying, "Do this in remembrance of me" to his disciples as they had their last supper together.

Then he thought about how Jesus allowed his captors to nail him to the cross.

Michael knew enough to understand that humanity was corrupted. Humans were driven by their own sins as well as the deception of people in positions of authority.

He knew that most of the planet was under the control of people who were Machiavellian. They used deceit and cunning to manipulate other people.

Michael would have to use his power of persuasion to get people to see the light. He knew he would have to appeal to the emotion, logic, and character of people who could then carry the message to others.

If persuasion did not work, humanity would have no hope and would continue to use force to kill, to destroy, to perpetuate fear, and to corrupt everything they put their hands on.

This would be a process of reasoning, explaining, coaxing, and bribing people to bring them in line to what Michael's visions had told him. Humanity needed to have hope and not be deterred by fear or caution. It was a huge commitment. He would have to pick people who already shared his values first and help to win them over.

Communication was not about control. It was about understanding what was said and how to adjust the message. He needed to speak in a way that elicited trust, honesty, and fair play. He would have to keep it positive. People had to believe in his integrity.

Michael understood the basic needs of humankind had to be met before he could progress to the more logical parts of the mind. People had to have self-esteem. With self-esteem others could help Michael by acting competent, getting people to give their acceptance and recognition.

People needed to understand they were part of a bigger life force than humanity. He could help them explore these areas. Once there was a worldwide change in their hearts, they would begin to see that the resources of the planet were limited and the damage that had been done to Earth had to be corrected.

Michael would have to help make sure all people received shelter, food, water, safety, and even medical care.

This assuredly was a huge undertaking. But, as Angela had said, the Pleadians had been helping to stabilize Earth for hundreds of years. He turned his head and looked at Angela.

Angela was awake and looking at him. He looked back at her but had slight misgivings about who and what she was. Did she see him as an inferior species?

"No, Michael, I don't think of you that way. You are my equal. You are my husband. I am in love with you. Please believe me," Angela spoke up.

"I'm your equal, but you can read my thoughts? Please explain that one to me, Angela," Michael replied.

"Michael, you are just going to have to trust me on this. You believe in God. You haven't given up on him, have you?"

"I'm pretty sure about Heaven. But, all this knowledge has left me off balance," Michael replied.

"Michael, it's time to be an adult. Some innocence has been taken from you. Nevertheless, my people are working to keep the warring species from obliterating Earth. They have been able to scare the demonic forces away for centuries now. Do you want to know how?"

"Yes," he replied.

Michael didn't like the feeling of fear that he had. But, he had momentarily felt like a bug in a trap, which scared the hell out of him.

"Michael, I love you, and I know you love me. Don't give up on God. The Pleiadians are physical and spiritual beings like we are. They are part of the force that binds all living things together."

"You said it yourself. Love always wins in the end. Love is forever. You believe that, don't you, Michael?"

"Angela, I am content knowing that no matter what the vicissitudes of this life bring my way, I will always have the strength of my creator to see me through. The physical and emotional attacks that I might endure pale in comparison to my strength of spirit. My heart and mind bring me joy. That joy is manifested as a sword and shield to use in battle against evil. You strengthen my resolve. I will serve in whatever way is necessary to squelch the suffering and heal Earth. I'm ready to do battle. I've seen the wonderment of heaven in my dreams. It was beyond my comprehension. I will follow my heart, protect the planet, and change the hearts of humankind.

"I think I just felt a momentary insanity over the evil that I will have to face. I'm okay now. I love you, Angela." Michael slid himself next to Angela, put his head between her breasts, and fell asleep.

"Michael, you can do it, with the help of God and my people." Angela comforted and held him close to her.

Afterword

The Earth is a marvelous life form that supports billions of other life forms. Its survival depends on an intricate balance of factors. Man evolved as an aggressive and intelligent creature capable of exploiting the environment to fit his needs. This helped humanity to survive harsh conditions on the planet. Natural disasters, pestilence and war have killed millions of people over the millennia. Competition for food and shelter may have sparked a primitive response for man to kill man. Humanity has accelerated the extinction of other species. Man flourished while natural resources were exploited to extreme. An Industrial Revolution took place in the last 200 years that dramatically expanded man's ability to manipulate the Earth through advancements in science and other technology. Mankind thrived and grew to great numbers, but the desire for war never went away. This need to kill for survival was replaced by a heightened need to kill for pleasure. Long ago humanity had the knowledge and understanding of how to live in harmony with each other and with the planet, but chose to take the wrong path. Mankind has poisoned the water, soil and atmosphere. Now the Earth is prepared to react with such force that all life on the planet's surface could be wiped out. There may be one option left for humanity. Stop the selfish, arrogant, self-centered, destructive behavior and reverse the damage or face extinction at the hands of a global cataclysm.

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